

Superintendent's COVID-19 Update

January 19, 2022

Over the past week we have seen a significant decrease in COVID-19 cases for students and staff. I continue to meet weekly with the Dedham Health Department to review cases counts and trends, and to discuss upcoming initiatives and mitigation measures. Our nurses, principals, administrative assistants, and COVID coordinator Emily Kadehjian continue to work extremely hard to test, monitor, and track cases in the schools. Everyone is exhausted, but we are all pitching in wherever needed to safely keep our schools open.

I have met over the past few weeks with a new “Town of Dedham COVID Task Force” to discuss how the Town is responding to the recent spike in COVID cases. I think the Town is very aware that the schools are aggressively tracking and testing to keep our schools safe, and I was grateful to be able to participate in these discussions. Ultimately, the Town has moved forward with a program to purchase and distribute rapid antigen tests to eligible community members. More information on that program may be seen in this [1/18/22 Health Department Update](#).

During the Friday, 1/7 snow day and over the weekend, I held a number of meetings with principals, nurses, and central office staff. On Sunday, Jan. 9 I sent a [district update](#) to all staff and caregivers announcing updated protocols for the district's response to the surge in COVID-19 cases. This included the maintenance of pooled testing, and the discontinuation of contact tracing and nightly close contact notifications. These notices will now be distributed weekly on Wednesdays district wide.

On Monday, January 10, 2022 DESE Commissioner Jeff Riley extended the state's mask mandate through February 28, 2022. Details about this mask mandate extension may be found in this [1/10/22 DESE memo](#).

On Tuesday, 1/18/22 Governor Baker and DESE Commissioner Jeff Riley announced a new program to distribute COVID-19 rapid tests to consented staff and students in all K-12 Massachusetts public schools. This would require school districts to sign up (Dedham signed up yesterday), and continue with their pooled testing programs. DESE would no longer continue the state's “Test and Stay” Program, and contact tracing in public schools would no longer occur. As you may recall, contact tracing outside of schools by public health departments ceased in December.

The idea is that each week DESE would ship a single rapid antigen test kit (containing 2 individual tests) to each consented staff member. This rapid test would be self-administered later in the week (Thursday or Friday), since staff would participate in pooled testing earlier in the week (Monday or Tuesday). In that way there would be two tests for each consented staff member each week and the following week (since there are 2 tests in each kit).

On alternate weeks, test kits for all consented students would be shipped to districts. Those test kits would be distributed to all consented students so they could test in the same manner as adults.

Information about this new DESE program in the form of [this 1/18/22 DESE/DPH memo](#) was forwarded to all school districts yesterday.

District Principals met yesterday evening to sort through information about this new program and to determine how we would proceed logistically. I will be putting together an overview of this program to communicate to all staff and caregivers tonight.

The most recent data regarding COVID cases in Dedham and the Dedham Public Schools are shown below:

[COVID-19 data for Town of Dedham](#)

[COVID cases in MA schools](#) (For comprehensive statewide results, click [HERE](#))

[Positive COVID Cases in DPS Schools](#)

[DPS Pooled Testing Participation and Results](#)

[DPS Student & Staff Attendance January 2022](#)