



October 1, 2021

To: Schools in St. Mary's County  
Re: COVID-19 Prevention & Mitigation for Schools

Dear School Principal and Leadership Team:

Ongoing surveillance of [local COVID-19 data](#)<sup>1</sup> by the St. Mary's County Health Department (SMCHD) has shown a continuing surge of the COVID-19 pandemic, likely driven by the new Delta variant of the virus. This state of high community transmission of COVID-19 is mostly affecting those who are not yet vaccinated, although some breakthrough infections of COVID-19 are happening in persons who have been vaccinated. The case rate in the 0-19 age group is higher than it has been at any point in the pandemic.

In accordance with the [Local Public Health Advisory](#)<sup>2</sup> issued by SMCHD, community members (vaccinated and unvaccinated) are strongly urged to wear masks in indoor settings and to get fully vaccinated if they are age eligible. COVID-19 vaccines are very effective in protecting against severe disease and death from variants of the COVID-19 virus that are currently circulating, including the Delta variant. **For more information or to make a vaccine appointment, visit [smchd.org/covid-19-vaccine](https://smchd.org/covid-19-vaccine) or call SMCHD at (301) 475-4330.**

SMCHD recommends a layered approach to reducing the spread of COVID-19 in schools - including COVID-19 vaccination, wearing face masks indoors, improvements to building ventilation, air filtration, physical distancing, and hand hygiene.

### Local School Guidance

Local schools can do their part to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our community by following these public health recommendations:

#### Masking:

- Require students, employees, and visitors age 2 and older to wear a mask indoors (and outdoors when in groups where six feet distance is difficult to maintain) - example Signage: [Masks Required](#)
- Encourage and make available more effective mask options - such as medical grade, ASTM-rated three-ply surgical masks and K-N95 masks

<sup>1</sup> <http://smchd.org/covid-19-data>

<sup>2</sup> <https://smchd.org/2021/07/local-public-health-advisory-recent-rise-in-covid-19-cases/>

### **COVID-19 Vaccine:**

- Offer vaccine incentive programs to encourage employees and students to get a [COVID-19 vaccine](#) - previously vaccinated workers in school settings may now also be eligible for a [COVID vaccine booster dose](#)
- Implement policies requiring employee and student (age 12 and older) vaccination
  - Student vaccination as a prerequisite for participation in high risk sports and high risk extracurricular activities (e.g., football, wrestling, chorus)

### **School Environment:**

- Make [improvements to building ventilation](#)<sup>3</sup> and air filtration
  - Keep windows open in classrooms, on school buses, cafeterias, auditoriums, school libraries, and other locations when possible
  - Use HEPA air purifier units or HEPA air filtration systems, especially in settings like classrooms and cafeterias
- Make handwashing or hand sanitizer readily available
- Move school activities outdoors as feasible
- Cohort students as best as possible and maintain six foot distancing in cafeteria settings (please note: the 3-6 foot CDC exception for close contact definition in school classrooms does not apply to cafeterias, school buses, and other non-classroom settings)
- Limit non-essential visitors
- During times of substantial or high transmission: Limit sports and extracurricular activities to those that can be held outdoors, with more than 6 feet of physical distancing. Consider canceling high-risk sports and high-risk activities.

### **COVID-19 Testing:**

- Implement a weekly COVID testing program for screening purposes - some schools have considered weekly testing of all unvaccinated students/staff, or have randomly selected a certain percentage of unvaccinated staff/students for this each week
- Screening testing for participation in high risk sports and high risk extracurricular activities twice per week
- The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and Maryland State Department of Education have grant support to offer screening and diagnostic testing services in K-12 schools. Schools that are interested in onsite testing operations should contact the MDH COVID-19 Testing Task Force at [MDH.K12Testing@maryland.gov](mailto:MDH.K12Testing@maryland.gov)

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/ventilation.html>

For more information and resources for local schools related to COVID-19 please visit: [smchd.org/coronavirus](https://smchd.org/coronavirus) and click on **Schools & Parents+**<sup>4</sup>. Schools may also contact the COVID-19 support team in our Environmental Health Division for further guidance at (301) 475-4321 or [smchd.env@maryland.gov](mailto:smchd.env@maryland.gov).

Thank you for your attention to this important matter as we work together to protect the health and safety of our community.

Sincerely,



Meenakshi Brewster, MD, MPH  
Health Officer  
St. Mary's County, Maryland

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<sup>4</sup> <https://smchd.org/2020/03/covid-19-schools/>  
<https://www.nfhs.org/media/4295118/nfhs-smac-statement-on-risk-of-covid-19-during-high-school-sports-january-27-2021-final.pdf>