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www.health.ri.gov

Memo

To: Pre K-12 Schools and District Leaders

From: Center for COVID-19 Epidemiology (CCE)

Date: August 24, 2023

Subject: Back to School COVID-19 Reminders and Updates

Dear School and District Leaders,

We hope you have had an enjoyable summer!

In preparation for the 2023-24 school year, RIDOH expects increases in COVID-19 this fall and winter season. Centers for Disease Prevention and Control's (CDC) **COVID-19 guidance for schools remains largely the same**. The goal remains to prevent students and staff from getting very sick from COVID-19 and to minimize disruptions to school and families.

RIDOH encourages you to review the following COVID-19 information and updates:

COVID-19 Key Recommendations

Students and staff should continue to take preventive actions to avoid getting very sick and/or spreading COVID-19 including

- [Staying up to date](#) with COVID-19 vaccine;
- Staying home when sick and getting tested when you have [COVID-19 symptoms](#);
- If [exposed](#) to someone with COVID-19, monitoring symptoms; testing after day 5; and wearing a mask through day 10;
- If [you have COVID-19](#), isolating at home for 5 days and wearing a mask through day 10;
- If at [higher risk](#) of getting very sick, have a [COVID-19 plan](#).

Schools and districts are encouraged to

- Review [CDC's operational guidance for K-12 schools](#); and
- Monitor COVID-19 trends, such as hospital admission levels (HALs), in Rhode Island on [RIDOH's Data Hub](#) to stay informed about when to consider additional [steps to reduce the spread of COVID-19](#).
 - Additional steps are recommended when HALs are medium or high.

COVID-19 Operational Updates

Testing remains an important tool to detect infection and prevent COVID-19 spread. With the expiration of federal and state COVID-19 test kit distribution programs, schools and districts may choose to purchase tests to encourage and support access to testing for both students and staff.

- Rhode Island Department of Administration (DOA) approved a **Master Price Agreement** for **COVID-19 test kits (MPA #611)** that allows for schools to procure both rapid antigen test kits and PCR tests. Find detailed information on the [Contract Board](#), including an [Agency User Guide](#). If you have any questions, please email the assigned Rhode Island Department of Purchasing representative at David.Francis@purchasing.ri.gov.
- **COVID-19 remains a reportable illness at both federal and state levels.** Schools should continue to report COVID-19 outbreaks to RIDOH. An outbreak is defined as 5 or more cases *OR* 20% of a core group (i.e., same class, sports team, office) within a 7-day period. RIDOH has developed a **simplified, online Outbreak Reporting Form for schools to use starting in the fall**. The form aims to reduce administrative and time burden on schools while leveraging technology for effective COVID-19 surveillance. We'll share more information once the online reporting form link is live.

Districts and schools are encouraged to share the updated Pre K-12 School COVID-19 Resource Guide with staff and use the materials for your outreach and communication with students and families. [\[English\]](#)[\[Spanish\]](#)[\[Portuguese\]](#)

Please feel free to contact us for any questions or support needs at RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov

Thank you for your support and cooperation,

CCE Education Team