



Colchester School District

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January 20, 2022

CSD Community,

As we shared in [an update last week](#), the State of Vermont has made widespread changes to how they approach COVID-19, including how school districts should identify and notify individuals of school-based exposures. The major tenets of this new system were outlined in a series of memos from the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) at the end of last week. The CSD COVID response team has reviewed the documents, assessed the current amount of testing supplies on hand, and subsequently developed a phased-in approach to this transition.

Why the Change?

It's clear that the Omicron variant spreads far more easily and quickly, making the current method of contact tracing ineffective from a public health perspective. In response, the AOE and VDH are once again asking schools to adjust our prevention and mitigation strategies so that we can remain open for in-person instruction and maintain a safe and healthy environment for students and staff.

The Best Prevention Measure

Going back to the basics – *stay home when you're sick, even if you have a negative test result.* Those with symptoms are not permitted to come to school. If you have a stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, fever, or [any other symptom of COVID-19](#), you must stay home and not attend school or related events such as practices, games, or cocurriculars.

If you come to school, you are risking exposing your classmates or colleagues to the virus and you will be sent home. If symptoms begin while at school, we suggest testing in the nurses' office before heading home ([click here to sign up for in-school testing if you haven't already](#)).

Students and staff members can return to school when their symptoms improve, they are fever-free for 24 hours, and they test negative using a PCR test or two antigen tests as close as possible to 24 hours apart.

Shifting from Individualized Contact Tracing to Exposure Notifications

The state is no longer conducting tracing of COVID cases and the state has made it clear that schools should no longer conduct contact tracing. Instead, they are asking schools to put an emphasis on two things:

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Superintendent
of Schools

George Trieb
Business & Operations
Manager

Carrie Lutz
Director of Student
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Gwendolyn Carmolli
Director of Curriculum
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1. Make broad exposure notifications on a classroom, grade, or school level, based on what's appropriate.
2. Increase the accessibility of rapid tests for families and staff to use at home.

Exposure Notifications

Moving forward, we are shifting to more broad exposure notifications by email only. Families who are signed up for district text messages will also receive a text alert (to sign up text "y" to 67587).

- For PreK and elementary grades, this means that classes who had an exposure will receive an email with the dates that the positive individual was in school. From there, families will be responsible for checking to see if their child was in class that day and subsequently following the testing options outlined in the email.
- At the middle school and high school level, it gets a little more complicated because students move around the building for their classes and mix with other students more often. At the middle school, we will email notification with exposure dates and testing options by team. At the high school level, we will post a daily list of mods/classes that had exposures on our website, along with testing options. We are finalizing that page of the site tonight and anticipate it being available tomorrow through a link on our main COVID case page: www.csdvt.org/covidcases.

To keep the community informed about cases around the district, we will continue updating the case data on our website regularly: www.csdvt.org/covidcases. The case data on that link includes the 13 new cases from today, January 20.

If you have any questions or concerns about a potential exposure, we encourage you to reach out to the school nurse or your child's healthcare provider. Any student or staff member, who is symptom-free, that would like to rapid antigen test can stop by Bayside Activity Center at the times outlined in the next section of this email.

At-Home Tests and the Test to Stay Program at Bayside

The ultimate plan is for every student or staff member, regardless of their vaccination status, who is exposed or concerned of an exposure, to have access to at-home testing kits supplied through the district. Obviously, to do this, the district needs a significant increase in testing supplies from the state, *which we are still waiting for*. While we are hopeful that we will receive enough testing kits to give to every exposed student and staff member, we are not confident enough to depend on it just yet. To ensure there is adequate access to testing for students and staff, we are going to continue to operate the CSD Test to Stay Program at the [Bayside Activity Center](#) each school day from 6:30 am - 8:30 am, until we receive enough at-home test kits.

Please be reminded that individuals with symptoms are not eligible to test at Bayside or come to school. COVID testing for symptomatic individuals must happen through the [Vermont Department of Health](#) or your physician's office. To test at Bayside or a nurse's office, you also must make sure you have [filled out the consent forms ahead of time](#). You only need to fill them out once per individual.

Testing Positive

If a student or staff member tests positive, please let your school nurse or administrator know. Our nurses provide individualized guidance to each person who tests positive. They go over the isolation timeline including when it's safe to return to school, and provide general support. The district will take care of making notifications to those exposed at school as outlined above, however, VDH is no longer conducting contact tracing for hours outside of school. They are ask positive individuals, or their families, to be responsible for notifying anyone who may have been exposed outside of the school day. [Read more about what to do if you test positive.](#)

Masks

The AOE is requiring masks in schools when indoors until at least February 28. Please remember to send your student with several masks each day. CSD does have a limited supply of student masks for those in need. [Read more about masks and how to protect yourself and others.](#)

Thank You

Every time we announce a shift in guidance, testing, or school operations, I'm optimistic that we are getting closer to a time when COVID-19 doesn't have a prominent role in education. Even with the high case counts, we are encouraged by our community's continued support, optimism, and willingness to help. Keep checking in with your friends and family, be kind to those experiencing or recovering from COVID-19, and reach out if you need help.

Be well,

Amy Minor
Superintendent of Schools