

**Worcester Public Schools
COVID-19 Protocols
2021-2022**

HEALTH QUESTIONS

What PK-12 health and safety protocols are being recommended now by health experts and key decision-makers in light of the Delta variant of the virus?

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends COVID-19 vaccination for all adolescents 12 years of age and older who do not have contraindications for the vaccine. All students older than 2 years and all school staff should wear face masks at school regardless of vaccination status.
- *Update: The MA State Board of Education voted on 8/24/21 to give authority to the Commissioner of Education to require indoor masking in schools through the month of September.*

My child is immunocompromised and in-person learning does not feel safe to me. Is there a remote option this year?

- As noted in the Updates to DESE COVID-19 Guidance released in August 2021, all districts and schools will be required to be in-person, full-time, five days a week this fall.

What are the health and safety rules for the Worcester Performing Arts?

- No mitigation is needed for outdoor performances depending on the level of local and state transmission rates. Outdoors remain the safest space for performances.
- Masking with appropriate material remains the best way of reducing potential infected aerosol from circulating in an indoor space. Masks are recommended to be worn while singing and speaking.
- Bell covers made from appropriate material remain the best way of reducing potential infected aerosol from circulating in an indoor space.
- Depending on your comfort level, instrumentalists can wear masks only when speaking and slit performance masks are optional.
- In spaces with good ventilation rates and HEPA filtration, increased indoor rehearsal times of 50 minutes may be considered. A minimum of 3 air exchanges per hour should be used, if there are spaces with higher air change rates, you may consider longer rehearsal times.
- Continue good hygiene practice moving forward, including appropriate elimination of brass fluid.
- Plastic face shields only stop large droplets, not aerosol; room dividers inhibit the function of the HVAC system and are not recommended.

If a student or staff member is sick and experiencing symptoms, such as fever, cough, runny nose, what should they do?

- Students, faculty, and staff are directed to stay home if they are sick.
- If an individual presents to school with more than one of the above-mentioned symptoms, they will need to go home until clearance criteria for school return is met.
- Below is the full list of symptoms for which caregivers should monitor their children, and staff should monitor themselves. Unvaccinated individuals and any close contacts presenting these symptoms should follow testing and quarantine response protocols as outlined by WPS. Vaccinated individuals who are not close contacts should follow the testing and quarantine response protocols if they are experiencing symptoms in **bold**. These individuals may also seek clinical guidance to assess the need for PCR testing if they have other symptoms on this list.
- COVID-19 symptoms list:
 - **Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills**
 - **Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath**
 - **New loss of taste or smell**
 - **Muscle aches or body aches**
 - Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
 - Sore throat, when in combination with other symptoms
 - Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea when in combination with other symptoms
 - Headache when in combination with other symptoms
 - Fatigue, when in combination with other symptoms
 - Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) when in combination with other symptoms
- See DESE's Covid-19 protocol flow chart: [HERE](#)

MASK and SOCIAL DISTANCING QUESTIONS

What masking rules will WPS follow in the upcoming school year?

- The Worcester School Committee unanimously approved the WPS Administration's recommendation for all students and staff to wear masks indoors on Wednesday, August 11.
- The Worcester City Council approved a resolution that requires the use of masks indoors at all public and private schools in the city.

I am vaccinated. Will I need to wear a mask in the upcoming school year?

- Yes, everyone will be wearing masks while indoors at school--regardless of vaccination status. This will be mandated until further notice.

Will masks be required on WPS school buses and vans?

- Yes. By DESE regulations, all students and staff are required to wear masks on school buses at this time. (DESE/DPH COVID-19 Guidance for Districts and Schools: Fall 2021)

Are there any exemptions from the mask mandate?

- Exemptions will be rarely permitted and only for medically documented issues.

Will WPS require physical distancing when we return to school?

- There are no physical distancing requirements in place this year from the state, even during meals. Schools will support outdoor lunches when weather permits and attempt to distance during indoor lunches *as feasible*.

Will students be socially distanced in the cafeteria?

- *When possible* they will be socially distanced, removing their masks only to eat. Once students finish eating, masks must be worn.

CLOSE CONTACTS, VACCINATION, TESTING, QUARANTINING QUESTIONS

What is the current definition of a “close contact” and what steps are required of close contacts once school begins?

- Close contacts are defined as individuals who have been within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual while indoors, for at least 15 minutes during a 24-hour period. Please note that the at-risk exposure time begins 48 hours prior to symptom onset (or time of positive test if asymptomatic) and continues until the time the COVID-19 positive individual is isolated.

Is anyone exempt from quarantining if they are identified as a close contact?

The following close contacts are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols:

- **Asymptomatic, fully vaccinated close contacts:** Individuals who are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- **Classroom close contacts:** An individual who is exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual in the classroom while both individuals were masked, so long as the individuals were spaced at least 3 feet apart, is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- **Bus close contacts:** Individuals on buses must be masked according to federal requirements. As such, individuals who are masked on buses when windows are open are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- **Close contacts who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days:** An individual who has been previously diagnosed with COVID-19 and then becomes a close contact of someone with COVID-19 is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols if:
 - *The exposure occurred within 90 days of the onset of their own illness **AND***
 - *The exposed individual is recovered and remains without COVID-19 symptoms.*

Can WPS disclose the vaccination status of individual teachers, students, or classes?

- No, this is protected information.

Are all Worcester Public Schools staff members required to be vaccinated?

- Currently, there is no mandate for staff members to be vaccinated.

Will WPS host another vaccination clinic? If yes, when?

- During the spring, WPS hosted vaccination clinics at all middle and high schools. WPS is again hosting vaccination clinics in all middle and high schools.
- Please complete vaccination consent forms, it can be found on the WPS website and/or obtained from your school nurse.
- Here is a link to WPS vaccination sites [HERE](#)

Will the district participate in a COVID-19 testing program this year?

- WPS has applied to and been accepted into the state testing program, Test and Stay. The district plans to use this program to offer on-site, rapid/antigen testing for students and staff. This program allows asymptomatic close contacts the ability to stay in school while they are being tested each day for 5-7 days.
- The district will continue to partner with Family Health Centers to provide symptomatic and asymptomatic COVID-19 testing for WPS staff and students.
- Students are encouraged to sign up for school based Family Health Centers.

What are the current travel restrictions? Will I be able to travel out of state without a quarantine?

- In Massachusetts, if you are fully vaccinated, you can resume activities that you did prior to the pandemic. Fully vaccinated people can resume activities without wearing a mask or physically distancing themselves, except where required by federal, state, local, tribal, or territorial laws, rules, and regulations, including local business and workplace guidance.
- For the most up to date information please visit: [Massachusetts Travel Information](#)

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL QUESTIONS

Will students be able to work in small groups?

- Small group and group activities can be held as long as all individuals are masked; physical distancing may be maintained when feasible.

Will there be a remote learning option for students this year?

- The district will not be offering a fully remote learning option for families as this has not been approved by the state. According to DESE guidelines, remote learning as a standard learning model does not count as instructional learning time.
- All student absences related to quarantine or isolation will be excused.

- Asynchronous work will be available on students' Google Classroom and/or See Saw for COVID-19 related absences.

Will there be assigned seating this year?

- In order to conduct contact tracing as needed, the district will employ assigned seating whenever feasible. Current state guidance does not require assigned seating on buses.

Is there any plan to close individual classrooms or schools this year based on cases?

- There is currently no state provision allowing districts to close classrooms or schools based on case counts or other metrics.
- A district considering closing a classroom, grade level, or school for any reason related to COVID-19 must contact DESE prior to making any change.

What about volunteers?

- WPS will likely start the year with limited building access to the public to reduce the risk of transmission in buildings.
- Decisions about requirements and protocols for volunteers will be made after the start of the year.

Will field trips be supported this year?

- WPS hopes to be able to support field trips later in the year but these opportunities will likely be limited in the early fall.

How do I report an absence for my child?

- In the event that your child will be absent, tardy, or dismissed, please contact your child's school.

If my child is symptomatic, is there transportation for my child to return home from school?

- There is no WPS transportation for symptomatic students to be transported home.
- Parents/caregivers must provide timely transportation home.
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Who is responsible for student contact tracing?

- DPH is ultimately responsible for contact tracing.
- The principal and school nurse will work together to conduct contact tracing when reported during the school day.

Who do parents contact after school hours when they are notified their child is COVID-19 positive?

- During the school hours parents may contact the principal and/or the school nurse.

- After School hours, parents may contact the WPS Team from 5-7 PM Monday through Thursday and weekends from 9AM-5PM. Contact will be made through the COVID-19 Hotline; covid19@worcesterschools.net

Will my child be able to continue playing sports if they are an asymptomatic close contact?

- Students who are an asymptomatic close contact must participate in Test and Stay to continue to play.
- They must also conduct at home testing Saturday and Sunday. Home kits will be provided to athletes.
- If the student is symptomatic, they must follow the WPS isolation protocol, see above flow chart.

Who can participate in Test and Stay?

- All WPS staff and students who are an asymptomatic close contact can participate in Test and Stay; all individuals must sign a consent form.
- The consent form can be found in the green ribbon under [CIC consent form](#).