



Superintendent's UPDATE

Thursday, January 6, 2022

COVID-19 Return to School Update

Dear San Mateo County Education and Child Care Community,

Happy New Year! I know it's going to be a great one, but Omicron – oh my goodness! What a way to start 2022!

I am going to use this week's letter to focus on some of the recent events impacting schools during this current surge of COVID-19 in our county. I hope it will clear up some incomplete or misinformation that might be swirling about in the community. Now more than ever, we need to work together and focus on facts and science to keep students, school staff, and families healthy and moving forward in their school and work lives.

At-Home Test Kits

As part of a pilot program in early December, the State initiated a pilot program where public school districts could request at-home test kits to distribute *before* the holiday break. The pilot was limited and very popular, so many of our districts were not able to participate. The test kits provided as part of this pilot could be shared with both students and school staff.

On December 22, the Governor announced the State would provide at-home test kits for all K-12 public school students in California. The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) received these kits on December 29th and began distributing them to school districts and charter schools immediately. Per the State's requirements, these tests were to be distributed only to students for at-home use in returning to school after the holiday. This supply was not intended for use by school staff.

School and Community Testing

Before the Governor made his announcement about test kits, public and private schools across the county had already put in place testing programs for the return to school after break. These ongoing testing efforts included testing students and staff through a variety of means, including PCR tests, rapid antigen test, and pooled testing. These efforts are ongoing and will continue as we navigate through the current surge.

The County of San Mateo has stepped up its testing capacity to meet the growing need due to the Omicron variant. Community testing information can be [found here](#).

At-Home Test Kits for Preschools and Child Care Programs

The County Office of Education is working with San Mateo County Health (SMCH) to secure and distribute at-home test kits for State preschool programs and federally subsidized child care programs. Child care and preschool programs that are eligible for these at-home test kits will be notified. SMCOE and SMCH and other early learning partners will continue to work to secure testing supplies for child care and early learning settings.

Isolation for Students

The [California Department of Public Health's \(CDPH\) recommendations regarding isolation](#) in the event of contracting COVID-19 now apply to students. Under this updated guidance, everyone who has tested positive for COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, previous infection, or lack of symptoms, should follow these recommendations:

- Stay home for at least 5 days.
- Isolation can end after day 5 IF symptoms are not present or are resolving AND a diagnostic specimen (antigen test preferred) collected on day 5 or later, tests negative.
- Although PCR tests are acceptable, they are much less practical and useful in attempting to return to school after 5 days.
- If unable to test or choosing not to test, and symptoms are not present or are resolving, isolation can end after day 10.
- If fever is present, isolation should be continued until fever resolves.
- If symptoms, other than fever, are not resolving continue to isolate until symptoms are resolving or until after day 10.
- Wear a well-fitting mask around others for a total of 10 days, especially in indoor settings.

Quarantine for Students

From CDPH: "The current CDPH K-12 guidance regarding modified and standard quarantines remains unchanged at this time." That said, CDPH is actively reviewing new CDC guidance (issued yesterday, January 4, 2021) and hopes to provide updates soon.

Staff Isolation and Quarantine

Until Cal/OSHA, which governs employee safety standards, updates its guidance, it is our understanding that the [CDPH isolation and quarantine guidance](#) applies to school staff as well as students.

- For now, school staff can isolate for 5 days.
- Staff who are not fully vaccinated OR are vaccinated and eligible but have not yet received their booster dose, would follow the 5-day quarantine recommendation in the CDPH December 30th guidance.
- Staff who are boosted OR are vaccinated but not yet booster-eligible do not need to quarantine.
- It is our understanding that [Cal/OSHA](#) will be providing updated information shortly.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations and boosters continue to be the best way to provide protection against contracting and spreading COVID-19. Another benefit of being vaccinated is those who are vaccinated experience less severe illness if they do become infected. San Mateo County Health is offering pediatric COVID-19 vaccines [at eight sites](#) throughout the county during the month of January. Free and open to the public, these clinics will offer the Pfizer vaccine to children aged 5-11.

Advance appointments are encouraged and may be scheduled through [MyTurn](#), but families may also come without appointments. Appointments for second doses will be scheduled automatically at the same location three weeks after the first dose.

Boosters

Boosters are now recommended and available for everyone 12 years and older, five months after completing their primary COVID-19 vaccination series. This [CDC table](#) summarizes who is eligible and for which vaccine. Local, state, and federal health agencies all strongly recommend that those who are eligible get boosted ASAP.

San Mateo County Health's [website](#) lists several options for vaccinations, including boosters.

By working together as a strong and committed community, we can keep our students, staff, and schools moving forward. Onward we go into 2022!



Nancy Magee
San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools

Please note: A copy of this letter in Spanish will be [posted here](#) shortly.