

January 14, 2022

Dear Multnomah County students and families,

COVID is spreading quickly in our community, and the emergence of the Omicron variant has forced Public Health to mount a dramatic course change in hopes of meeting this new challenge.

We know it is very important for children and youth to learn in person for the sake of their overall lifelong health and wellbeing. The changes we describe below should do more to help schools stay open and keep students in class while addressing the reality that this virus is becoming widespread in our community.

People who are vaccinated can still get COVID, especially if it has been more than five months since a person got the original shots (two Pfizer, two Moderna, or one Johnson & Johnson). But most vaccinated people who get sick will get a cold-like illness and feel better after a few days at home. Many may not feel sick at all.

The sheer speed of Omicron means that many people are exposed, infected and contagious before we can even identify a case, much less get word to those who are exposed. The best protections under these circumstances are vaccines, boosters, and masks to avoid serious illness. And it is also why, this week, Multnomah County is also advising schools to change course on contact tracing. This means you may not get a notification if your child is exposed.

The Multnomah County Health Department recommends that as resources allow, schools prioritize contact tracing only in the following circumstances:

- Exposures during mealtimes when masks can't be worn. This approach will require assignment and tracking of lunch "pods."
- Any indoor learning or extracurricular activities that do not include masks.

Multnomah County Health Department recommends that schools continue:

- Directing people who are sick, or have a positive COVID test, to stay home and isolate for five (5) days. They can return on Day 6 with a well-fitting mask if they are feeling better. They do not need a negative test to return.
- Making sure everyone is using a well-fitted mask as much as possible.

Multnomah County Health Department recommends that families and staff:

- Get every recommended COVID vaccine they are eligible for including boosters, as soon as possible.
- Use well-fitting masks indoors.
- Keep sick kids home when they are sick, even if they test negative for COVID. Anyone with a fever should stay home until the fever has been gone for 24 hours (without the use of medicines that lower fever).

We want to acknowledge the profound pandemic fatigue people are experiencing and the concern you have for your family and school community. Like you and so many others, we are adapting as the virus evolves. Your attention to Public Health recommendations has helped keep our case counts and hospitalizations to some of the lowest rates per capita in the nation. We appreciate your continued partnership in this fast-moving and truly unprecedented situation.

Sincerely,



Deborah Kafoury
Multnomah County Chair



Jessica Guernsey, MPH
Multnomah County Public Health Director