



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH


Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary


STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., Interim State Superintendent of Schools

Memorandum

TO: Local Education Agencies
Nonpublic Schools
Licensed and Registered Child Care Providers

FROM: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D. 
Interim State Superintendent of Schools

Nilesh Kalyanaraman, MD 
Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services

CC: Local Health Officers

DATE: March 14, 2024

SUBJECT: Updated CDC Respiratory Virus Guidance - Schools and Child Care Programs

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) endorse the [Respiratory Virus Guidance](#) recently issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for use in schools and child care programs. This guidance provides recommendations and information to help people lower risk from a range of common respiratory viral illnesses, including COVID-19, influenza, and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). These recommendations apply to community settings, including schools and child care programs.

Core Prevention Strategies

The new CDC guidance recommends that all people use the following [core prevention strategies](#) for common respiratory viral illnesses:

- Stay up to date with [immunizations](#);
- Practice good [hygiene](#);
- [Take steps for cleaner air](#);
- When you may have a respiratory virus:
 - [Use precautions to prevent spread](#);
 - Seek health care promptly for testing and/or treatment if you have risk

factors for severe illness, as treatment may help lower your risk of severe illness.

Additional Prevention Strategies

The CDC outlines additional prevention strategies that can be taken to further protect yourself and others that include [masks](#), [physical distancing](#), and [tests](#).

Preventing The Spread of Respiratory Viruses When You're Sick

Using precautions to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses when you are sick is a core prevention strategy to lower risk from respiratory viruses. Updated CDC guidance when people may have a respiratory virus is as follows:

- Stay home and away from others (including people you live with who are not sick) if you have respiratory virus symptoms that aren't better explained by another cause.
- You can go back to your normal activities **when, for at least 24 hours, both are true:**
 - Your symptoms are getting better overall, **and**
 - You have not had a fever (and are not using fever-reducing medication).
- When you go back to your normal activities, **take added precaution over the next 5 days**, such as taking additional steps for cleaner air, hygiene, masks, physical distancing, and/or testing when you will be around other people indoors. These additional precautions are especially important to protect people with factors that increase their risk of severe illness from respiratory viruses.

Risk Factors

In addition to CDC's Respiratory Virus Guidance, there are several specific considerations for [people who are at higher risk](#) for severe illness. Schools and child care programs should be aware of these considerations, including those for [young children](#), [people with weakened immune systems](#), and [people with disabilities](#).

COVID-19 Testing

As a reminder, over the counter (OTC) test kits will continue to be provided by MDH to public and non-public schools upon request for the remainder of the 2023-2024 school year. Schools can distribute these test kits to students and families at their discretion.

Point of care (POC) test kits are available to School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) upon request.

Test kits can be ordered via a [Google form](#). Orders are generally delivered the following week. Schools can email mdh.k12testing@maryland.gov with questions.

School and Child Care Outbreaks

Schools and child care programs must continue to follow existing procedures for reporting communicable diseases (COMAR 10.06.01) and immediately notify the local health department of an outbreak due to COVID-19, influenza, or RSV. The local health department will recommend control measures in response to the outbreak which may include both core and additional prevention strategies such as exclusion of ill students/children and staff, mask

usage for cases, increased handwashing, increased environmental cleaning, and parent/guardian notification.

In certain situations, additional control measures may be recommended by the health department. Schools and child care programs should refer to the [Maryland Communicable Disease Summary](#) for information about other reportable conditions.

Note: This guidance replaces *Guidance Regarding COVID-19 and Other Respiratory Illnesses in K-12 Schools and Child Care* issued by MDH/MSDE on July 11, 2023.

It is also important to note that CDC has different guidance for healthcare settings, including [COVID-19](#), [influenza](#), and [general infection prevention and control](#). Certain elements of the guidance for healthcare settings apply to school health suites and SBHCs.

Questions about the respiratory virus guidance as it pertains to schools may be directed to Jasmin Whitfield at jasmin.whitfield@maryland.gov.

Questions about the respiratory virus guidance as it pertains to child care programs may be directed to Manjula Paul at manjula.paul1@maryland.gov.