

NORTHAMPTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Honorable Gina-Louise Sciarra, Mayor
Gwen Agna Aline Davis
Holly Ghazey Kaia Goleman
Dina Levi Margaret Miller
Meg Robbins Emily Serafy-Cox
Michael Stein



John A. Provost, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Nick Bernier, M.Ed.
Business Administrator

May 27, 2022

Dear NPS Community:

Below, please find the results of our pooled testing program for the week covering May 23-27.

May 23-27	Total Pools Tested	Presumed Positive Pools	Positive Cases	Cases Reported to School (Wed to Wed)
Bridge Street School	34	1	1	10
Jackson Street School	39	0	0	7
Leeds Elementary	36	3	2	3
R.K. Finn Ryan Road	30	0	0	3
JFK Middle School	38	2	2	12
NHS	36	2	2	9

Weekly pooled testing, reflex testing for positive pools, symptomatic testing, and home testing will continue, until the end of this school year.

Please continue to report positive home antigen test results to your building-based School Nurse or use the following link to report results to the Northampton Public Health Department:

<https://northamptonma.gov/2104/Covid-19-Information>

Today the SHAC met and recommended that we transition to a *mask advisory* in alignment with the Northampton Board of Health, removing the mask requirement. It is **highly recommended** that all individuals, regardless of vaccination status or past COVID-19 infection wear a mask at all times when indoors and in a public setting.

Attached, please find a statement from the public health department explaining the rationale for reverting to a mask optional policy at this time.

The link for self test kits is found at:

<https://northamptonschools.org/additional-covid-screening-options-consent-needed/>

I encourage all participants in the home kit program to test themselves before coming to school next Tuesday.

Sincerely,

John A. Provost, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



CITY OF NORTHAMPTON

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

NORTHAMPTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT
212 MAIN STREET
NORTHAMPTON, MA 01060

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Northampton Public Health
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Dear School Committee Members,

My apologies for not being able to be present at your meeting today.

In place of my presence at your meeting, I am providing my professional guidance to you in the following statement.

It is my professional recommendation to the Superintendent's Health Advisory Committee (SHAC) and the School Committee that the Northampton Public School District transition from a universal mask requirement to a mask advisory/mask optional policy. To support this recommendation, I am laying out the rationale for both the reinstatement of the mask requirement as well as the transition to a mask advisory.

Rationale for Temporary Reinstatement of Universal Mask Requirement on May 9, 2022

- Significant increase in clusters and cases
 - 300% increase in staff and student cases in the course of a 7-day period
 - 8 separate classroom clusters across the school district over the course of a 10-day period before the mask requirement was reinstated
 - Increased staff absences, leading to disruptions to learning, concerns about possible need to close classrooms and schools, redistribution of staff to prevent classroom closures
 - 36% of staff absences since May 1st were related to observed in-school transmission, which was identified through thorough contact tracing
- Such interventions would be considered in the context of staffing shortages and student absences resulting from increased in-school transmission of any infectious disease, such as influenza and pertussis. Public health interventions are not unique to COVID-19.
- Risk-benefit analysis
 - The reinstatement of masking was primarily driven by concerns surrounding in-school transmission, student absenteeism, and staffing shortages driven by COVID-related absences
 - School is an essential service and necessary for child development
 - At the time of reinstatement, masking was the preferred option over school or classroom closure

Rationale for Removal of Universal Mask Requirement, and Transition to Mask Advisory

- Cases and clusters have since decreased significantly (68% decrease), and there is a resulting decrease in the amount of COVID-related absences among students and staff
- There is no longer an immediate concern that classrooms or schools may need to close as a result of staffing shortages driven by COVID-related absences



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- With the warmer weather, classroom windows are open for improved filtration and more activities are occurring outdoors
- Risk-benefit analysis
 - We recognize that masks can impact speech-language development, emotional development, and mental health
 - The risks associated with not masking *at this time* no longer outweigh the possible long term risks of masking in this age group

Recommendation

- Transition to a mask advisory in alignment with the Northampton Board of Health, but remove the standing mask requirement; masks should be encouraged but optional at this time

Signed,

Merridith O'Leary, RS
Director of Public Health
Northampton Health Department