



Superintendent's UPDATE

Thursday, September 29, 2022

COVID-19 and School Health Update

Dear San Mateo County Education and Child Care Community,

I hope you are enjoying the crisp touch of fall in the air. Schools and students are fully engaged in their fall routines including Back to School Nights, student activities and sports, with college essays and fall carnivals just ahead. At the County Office of Education, we are keeping our fingers crossed that the welcome September rains help keep California fires and accompanying smoke at bay. Given the high volume of health news affecting schools lately, I have resumed my COVID-19 letter and added some additional health topics that may be of interest to our school communities and families.

Fentanyl and Naloxone

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. New forms of fentanyl are constantly emerging, the most recent of which is [“rainbow” fentanyl](#) which is prepared to look like brightly colored candy to appeal to young people. It is critical that parents and students know that fentanyl is widely found in many forms in San Mateo, including mixed with other drugs. The number of overdoses and deaths by fentanyl among youth in San Mateo has increased. There are many [informative resources](#) available to help parents and students learn about the deadly impacts of fentanyl.

Naloxone is a life-saving medication that reverses an opioid overdose while having little to no effect on an individual if opioids are not present in their system. Naloxone is administered when a patient is showing signs of opioid overdose. Naloxone works by blocking the opioid receptor sites, thereby reversing the toxic effects of the overdose. It has few known adverse effects and no potential for abuse. The State of California created the [Naloxone Distribution Project](#) (NDP) to combat opioid overdose-related deaths in California. SMCOE and the Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities are working with San Mateo County Health (SMCH) on a Naloxone Protocol for Schools Toolkit and to secure a supply for school districts in the county through NDP. More information and training for school district leaders is forthcoming.

COVID Situation in San Mateo County and Schools

Cases of COVID-19 have remained fairly steady in San Mateo County. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the COVID-19 community level has remained low, reflecting decreased cases numbers and hospitalizations due to COVID. Our experience in schools reflects this data, and after a few bumps at the beginning of the school year, cases have remained low in schools and child care settings.

COVID and Flu Vaccinations

Vaccinations remain the best way to protect oneself from COVID and the flu. With new bivalent vaccines available, school staff and students over age 12 can protect themselves and each other during the coming months. This bivalent vaccine acts against two strains – the original virus strain and the Omicron variant, which are predicted to continue circulating this fall and winter. The updated booster is recommended for everyone age 12+ who has completed the primary series and can be co-administered with the flu vaccine. Children under age 12 may receive the earlier versions of the vaccine.

Updated boosters are available from primary health care providers, such as Kaiser and Sutter, and pharmacies such as Walgreens and CVS. SMCOE will be hosting a vaccination clinic for anyone ages three and up at its Anne Campbell Center at 65 Tower Road in San Mateo on Friday, October 14, and Friday, November 18, from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. See [this flyer](#) for more information and a link to register. You can also learn about additional vaccination clinics on [SMCH's website](#).

If you would like to host a vaccination clinic at your school site, please contact SMCOE School Nurse [Jean Kortz](#) to explore options.

Status of Masks in Schools

Per [guidance](#) released on September 20, California has shifted its masking approach to align more closely with the CDC's COVID-19 [Community Levels](#), which are mentioned above. The California Department of Public Health is also working to align its recommendations for schools with those of the general population. Therefore, there are currently no specific masking requirements for schools except that they must allow any individual to wear a mask if they so desire. Some school districts had already pegged their masking policy to the CDC's Community Levels at the beginning of the school year, so they are already aligned with CDPH's recommendations. If conditions worsen in the community or on their campuses, schools have the flexibility to reinstate masking requirements.

COVID Testing

Testing before the start of school was a great way to reduce the spread of COVID-19 on campuses. Testing continues to play an important role in helping those who are not feeling well, have traveled, or were exposed to COVID to take control of their health and isolate if needed. The County Office of Education expects to receive more test kits from the State of California in preparation of the holiday season, but we have not received confirmation of this.

Thank you all for your work to support our students and schools.



Nancy Magee
San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools

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