



# Superintendent's UPDATE

Thursday, March 17, 2022

## COVID-19 School and Vaccination Update

Dear San Mateo County Education and Child Care Community,

We are a few days into what may seem like new territory – the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) now strongly recommends that masks be worn in schools and no longer requires them. However, many schools have been cautious about lifting their own requirements for masks until at least after spring break. Even in schools where masks are only strongly recommended, many teachers and students continue to wear them indoors in schools.

As we move forward, I expect we will continue to see more settings where some students and staff wear masks and others do not. I expect that we have gained the knowledge and the wisdom to respect and support personal decisions in this matter. Our students have already endured enough challenges during the pandemic, and social stigma around wearing – or not wearing – a mask should not be one of them. This [poster](#) helps support that message.

### **Trauma-Informed Approach to Changes in COVID-19 Guidance**

As we continue to peel away safety measures, masks being the most visible and impactful, we are aware changes in guidance may cause anxiety among students and staff, especially those who may have experienced trauma as a result of COVID-19. To help school leaders create a supportive school environment as guidance continues to change, SMCOE created this [Trauma-Informed Approach to Changes in COVID-19 – Guidance for School Leaders](#).

### **Masking to Continue in SMCOE Special Education Programs**

Last night, the San Mateo County Board of Education and I adopted a [resolution](#) requiring masks, except for those exempt, in our Special Education program. Many of the students we serve in our program are in fragile health or experience multiple medical challenges. Since the health and safety of our students are the top priority, extending the masking requirement through the end of the school year is the right decision for this program.

### **Focus on Group Tracing and Not Quarantining**

In addition to masks, CDPH also strongly recommends that schools utilize the notification-based model provided in [Group Tracing Approach to Students Exposed to COVID-19 in a K-12 setting](#). The group tracing approach focuses on prompt notification, testing, and isolation and replaces previous recommendations that were centered on quarantine, including modified

quarantine. According to CDPH, group tracing reflects the prevalent variant's shorter incubation period, airborne nature of transmission, and increased transmissibility. This approach also reflects the priority to keep students in school learning and not home in quarantine. Remember when everyone needed to quarantine at home for 14 days? This is progress.

### **Ventilation**

A stalwart of COVID-19 guidance has been ventilation. Schools are encouraged to ventilate classrooms with outside air, to prioritize the use of high quality filtration, and to conduct learning outside when the weather permits. This last option also supports physical and mental health. CDPH continues to update its ventilation guidance for schools, providing both [easy-to-digest summaries](#) and more [technical information](#) for facilities managers. All of this is available on the [Safe Schools for All Hub](#). The California Schools Healthy Air, Plumbing, and Efficiency Program ([CalSHAPE](#)) provides funding to upgrade heating, air conditioning, and ventilation systems in public schools. A new round of CalSHAPE funding opens on March 28<sup>th</sup> and can be used for assessments, maintenance, filters, CO2 monitors, and other ventilation-related work.

### **Vaccinations**

As of this week, 60.7 percent of children ages 5-11 have received two doses of vaccine, up slightly from 60.2 percent last week. The vaccination rate for youth ages 12-15 remained at 82.2 percent. The booster rate for this age group climbed from 38.8 to 39.6 percent. In order to protect against future variants, we continue to encourage all those who have not yet gotten boosted, to do so as soon as possible. Vaccination opportunities abound, including weekly clinics in South San Francisco, Daly City, San Mateo, Half Moon Bay, Redwood City, and East Palo Alto. More information can be found on the [SMC Health website](#).

As I listen to our health officials who provide us with regular reports on who is experiencing severe illness and ending up in the hospital, I am committed to redoubling our efforts to help get our community vaccinated. We will work with San Mateo County Health to explore how we can help lift vaccination rates among our county's children and their families. Hopefully, a vaccination option for our youngest children will be available soon as well.

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.