

September 28, 2021

Greetings, School Superintendents and Administrators,

Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health has developed a set of recommendations for our public, private and charter school partners to help combat the high transmission rate of COVID-19 Delta variant in Ramsey County.

The **recommendations** below will help to achieve the primary goal of slowing the transmission rate of the Delta variant. Our recommendations are based on guidance by federal and state partners, grounded in facts and the best available science, and what has been effective during this pandemic. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), the Delta variant is highly contagious, more than twice as contagious as previous variants. Unvaccinated people (including children under 12 years who are not yet eligible to get the vaccine) remain the greatest concern. The greatest risk of transmission is among unvaccinated people who are much more likely to get infected and transmit the virus.

Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health supports the following recommendations, consistent with CDC guidance to help mitigate transmission among our school-age youth until all are eligible for vaccination. Students benefit from in-person learning, as we acknowledge distance learning created hardships for students and families.

Recommendation #1: Encourage vaccination

The most effective step our community can take to end the pandemic and protect our students, teachers, staff and visitors, is for everyone to get fully vaccinated as soon as they are eligible. Vaccination of those eligible (people 12 years and older) is strongly encouraged. Once vaccine becomes available for children under 12 years old, we will revise our recommendations. Please encourage staff and families who have yet to be vaccinated to take advantage of the following opportunities:

Options for free COVID-19 vaccines:

- Walk in or make an appointment through Minnesota's [Vaccine Locator Map](#). If you have questions or need language assistance, call the Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 Public Hotline at 1-833-431-2053 (Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. – 7 p.m. and Saturday, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.)
- Use the [CDC Vaccine Finder](#) to find pharmacy appointments and search by vaccine type (e.g., Pfizer).
- Stop by one of these [YMCA locations](#).
- Contact your primary health care provider or a local pharmacy.

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Saint Paul, MN 55107
Phone: (651) 266-2400
Fax: (651) 266-2593
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www.co.ramsey.mn.us

- Visit ramseycounty.us/COVID19vaccine for locations of community clinics operated by our public health department.

Recommendation #2: Universal masking

Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health fully supports the [latest guidance from CDC](#) regarding universal indoor masking for all of our K-12 schools.

- All teachers, staff, students and visitors to K-12 schools should wear a mask while indoors, regardless of vaccination status.
- Students should return to full-time in-person learning in the fall with layered COVID-19 prevention strategies in place.
- Students under 12 years of age should wear a mask in public spaces and around those who are not fully vaccinated.

Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health does not have the authority to mandate a mask policy for schools, but advises compliance with CDC guidance and strongly recommends that schools require masks. Ramsey County does have the authority and is [currently mandating a mask policy](#) for its employees and visitors to county-run facilities regardless of vaccination status.

Universal masking is in accordance with CDC guidance and is recommended so our youth are protected until they are eligible to be vaccinated. As of today, Ramsey County has a “high” transmission status, meaning there are 100 or more cases per 100,000 people, or a positivity rate of 10% or higher. Details are available on the [CDC COVID-19 data tracker](#).

Recommendation #3: Weekly testing for all those who are unvaccinated

Weekly testing is recommended for those who are not able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, have chosen not to, or are not yet eligible for the vaccine. Weekly testing is optional for those who are vaccinated but encouraged for all school-age children.

While testing may seem like an added burden to our families, it is a vitally important tool to combat the more contagious Delta variant which is now the dominant virus in our county. Even if children, staff and teachers are masked in school buildings, they are still subject to infection outside of school. According to the [Minnesota Department of Health](#) (MDH), regular testing can help identify new cases early, which can prevent spread in the classroom or community.

Options for free COVID-19 testing:

- Walk in or schedule an appointment at one of the state’s [COVID-19 Community Testing Sites](#).

- Order a free at-home test kit: [COVID-19 Saliva Testing at Home](#).
- Additional testing options: [Find Testing Locations](#).
- Find more information at: ramseycounty.us/Testing. Schools can also take advantage of the [Midwest Coordination Center Pool Testing Program](#). This program requires consent for participation and will take approximately two to four weeks to implement.
 - It is a nasal rapid test to identify COVID-19 cases in people who are asymptomatic or before they develop symptoms.
 - Tests are provided free through the federal government.
 - More information on the program is available at: testedandprotected.org.

These recommendations and further guidance can be found at: ramseycounty.us/HealthResources under *Guidance for K-12 schools*.

Please share this information with your families. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to William Moore by email at william.moore@ramseycounty.us or by phone at 651-308-1593

Sincerely,



Sara Hollie, MPH
Director



William Moore
COVID-19 School Support Director