

February 23, 2022

Greetings, School Superintendents and Administrators,

With Omicron remaining the dominant variant in the U.S., Saint Paul - Ramsey County Public Health (SPRCPH) has developed a set of recommendations for our public, private and charter school partners to help combat the high transmission rate of COVID-19 in Ramsey County.

The **recommendations** below will help to achieve the primary goal of slowing the transmission rate of COVID-19. 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 Omicron variant is highly contagious, and now the leading cause of COVID-19 infection in Ramsey County.

CDC says, "In areas of substantial or high transmission, CDC recommends community leaders encourage vaccination and universal masking in indoor public spaces in addition to other layered prevention strategies to prevent further spread."

Unvaccinated people (including children under 5 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. Current vaccines have been shown to protect against severe illness, hospitalization, and deaths due to infection with the Omicron variant.

SPRCPH supports the following recommendations, consistent with CDC and the Minnesota Department of Health guidance, to help mitigate substantial and high community transmission in Ramsey County.

### **Recommendation #1: 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. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely continue in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.

Vaccination of those eligible (people 5 years and older) is recommended. Once vaccine becomes available for children under 5 years old, we will revise our recommendations. CDC Director Rochelle Walensky has approved Pfizer boosters for teens ages 12 to 15, as COVID-19 hospitalizations rise among children. As you may also know, Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter signed Executive Order [2022-4](#) on Jan. 12, 2022, instituting a proof of vaccination or negative test requirement for licensed businesses and spaces of public accommodation in Saint Paul effective Jan. 19, 2022. As of Feb. 10, 2022, the mayor has rescinded that order as cases have declined.

Please encourage staff and families who have yet to be vaccinated to take advantage of the following opportunities:

- 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 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 appointments and search by vaccine type (e.g., Pfizer).
- Contact your primary health care provider or a local pharmacy.

- Visit [ramseycounty.us/COVID19vaccine](https://ramseycounty.us/COVID19vaccine) for locations of community clinics operated by our public health department. We are offering a \$50 gift card for the 1<sup>st</sup> dose of Pfizer vaccine, while supplies last.
- Governor Walz launched the “**Kids Deserve a Shot**” program January 1, 2022 – February 28, 2022. Learn more about the [Kids Deserve a Shot program](#).

### **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. The CDC currently recommends universal indoor masking by all students (ages 2 years and older), staff, teachers and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status ([see exceptions to masking on CDC website](#)). In addition to universal indoor masking, CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk.

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. In addition, Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter signed Executive Order [2022-3](#) on Jan. 5, requiring face masks to be worn indoors in all city-controlled facilities and at all businesses licensed by the City of Saint Paul and as of February 15<sup>th</sup> he has extended that order without amendment.

Based on the high levels of county transmission in Ramsey County we would recommend **universal masking** until we are **no longer** experiencing high or substantial community transmission with both case rates and positivity in Ramsey County.

As of Monday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, Ramsey County has a “high” COVID-19 transmission status, with **170 cases per 100,000 people**, or a positivity rate of **6.48%**. Details are available on the [CDC COVID data tracker](#). Ramsey County will continue to recommend universal masking until the transmission rate status moves from “**high (100+ cases per 100,000)**” to “**moderate (10-49 cases per 100,000)**” or “**low (<10 cases per 100,000)**” and will monitor current trends and conditions both nationally and locally on a weekly basis to reevaluate our current recommendations. **Universal masking requirements should remain for at least 2 weeks if the transmission rates drop below 100 new cases.**

### **Recommendation #3: Weekly testing for all 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.

While testing may seem like an added burden to our families, it’s a vitally important tool to combat the more contagious Omicron variant. 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.

Omicron is shown to have an extremely high infection rate and we are seeing reinfections among persons previously diagnosed. Details are available on [Ramsey County’s COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

Due to the high demand for COVID-19 testing nationwide, Vault Health has set a daily limit for at-home saliva tests for all their customers, including the free at-home tests for Minnesotans. The limit helps to preserve tests for Minnesota when demand is surging in other parts of the country, but it is possible that on some days, Minnesota will reach its daily limit. If this happens, try ordering the next day.

**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 from the State of Minnesota: [COVID-19 Saliva Testing at Home](#).
- Get four free at-home test kits from the U.S. government: [COVIDtests.gov](#)
- 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.

**Recommendation #4: Quarantine and Isolation**

New CDC guidance has reduced the recommended time for isolation and quarantine periods to five days. For details visit CDC's page on [Quarantine and Isolation](#).

These recommendations and further guidance can be found at: [ramseycounty.us/HealthResources](#) under *Guidance for K-12 schools*. We know that students benefit from in-person learning.

Given the current high infection rate in Ramsey County, staffing shortages and high rate of Omicron infectivity, Ramsey County supports consideration of all mitigation recommendations. This guidance emphasizes layered prevention strategies to protect students, teachers, staff, visitors and other members of their households and support in-person learning.

Districts should monitor community transmission, vaccination, testing and occurrence of outbreaks to guide decisions on in-person learning vs. distance learning.

Please share this information with your administration, staff and families. If you have further questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to William Moore by email at [william.moore@ramseycounty.us](mailto:william.moore@ramseycounty.us) or by phone at 651-308-1593.

Sincerely,



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Public Health Director



William Moore  
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