



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

prepared & empowered

May 10, 2022

Dear Portland Public Schools families and students,

I am writing to let you know that all students, staff and visitors at the Portland Public Schools will be required to wear a mask indoors and on school buses as of Thursday, May 12. This step has become necessary to help keep everyone safe as positive cases of COVID-19 are rapidly increasing in our community and schools. We encourage everyone to begin masking even before Thursday, if possible.

As you may have heard, Maine currently has the highest rate of new infections among all states, and Cumberland County is now categorized as “red” or “high” by the [federal CDC COVID-19 Community Levels](#) tracker. Our pooled testing results and local wastewater data also indicate high positivity rates. When the transmission of COVID in our community is that high, the CDC recommends that everyone wear a mask indoors.

In consultation with our medical team, we are following the CDC’s recommendation and requiring that everyone wear masks again indoors. Wearing a mask not only helps protect the person wearing the mask, but also those around them. Masking is most effective when everyone wears one.

I understand how disappointing this change may be to many of you who stopped wearing a mask when masking became optional on March 14 at a time of low case counts. However, I cautioned at that time that if our school and community data changed, we might need to increase our mitigation strategies, including returning to masking in some schools or district-wide.

This is now a time of high transmission, but few people in our schools are wearing masks. Adding to the risk is the fact that end-of-year ceremonies and other gatherings are taking place. While we are not recommending changes to these events, all these factors make a return to required masking the safest course at this time.

Please make sure your child comes to school by Thursday with a well-fitting, protective mask. We also have children’s sized KN95 masks free of charge to students of any families requesting them. Staff will also wear a protective mask. Here’s a [CDC mask guide](#).

As we’ve shared previously, the state pooled testing program is ending this month, so this week is the last week of pooled testing at the Portland Public Schools. Pooled testing was designed to prevent the spread of COVID, but with the rapid 1- to 2-day incubation period of the new variant, pooled testing is not able to identify cases before they may have already spread to others.

Instead of pooled testing, the Maine Department of Education and the Maine CDC are recommending frequent rapid testing. They have made up to six tests available for each PPS student and staff member. We have begun receiving student and staff rapid tests and will be distributing those over the next two weeks. Look for information from your school about when you will receive your tests.

Anyone with symptoms, vaccinated or unvaccinated, should stay home and test for COVID-19. If your student has symptoms, you should have at least two negative rapid tests at least 24 hours apart. Contact your school nurse before returning to school.

Vaccines and boosters remain the foremost protection against COVID. In partnership with Greater Portland Health, we are offering boosters to any eligible student at our school-based clinics at Casco Bay, Deering and Portland high schools, as well as vaccinations, and continuing our weekly COVID vaccination clinic at King Middle School. Here's a link to find [vaccination sites](#) in Maine. That site also contains information about booster shots.

COVID-19 has thrown us yet another curveball. But with every new challenge it sends our way, we have kept schools safe by working together. Thank you for your cooperation as we continue to do that in this latest phase of the pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'X. Botana', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Xavier Botana, Superintendent