



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

Date: August 25, 2021

Dear families,

Thank you for your continued support as we kick off the 2021-2022 school year. At Northampton Public School District, keeping your students safe and in school is our top priority. We have learned a great deal over this past year and our current guidance and procedures reflect the most updated recommendations from the CDC and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

For the 2021-22 school year, we are offering an extra layer of protection to prevent the spread of COVID-19, our COVID-19 testing program at school. This program has three components: **symptomatic testing** for students who show symptoms of COVID-19 at school, **routine COVID safety checks** to prevent the spread of the virus undetected among students who are not showing symptoms, and **test and stay** for students who may have been exposed while in school but are not showing symptoms. Each of these is a quick, non-invasive nasal swab sample that is collected under the supervision of a school nurse or trained health provider. Unlike COVID-19 tests of the past, these are not uncomfortable and easy for students to do themselves.

Students only participate with permission from a parent or guardian. It is important to Northampton Public School District that you are fully informed regarding the process and that we can answer any questions that you might have in advance of asking you to sign the consent form. Below we describe each of the three parts of our testing program, how they are conducted, and what they are used for.

Symptomatic testing is used when a student is showing symptoms of COVID-19 during school; students should not come to school if they are feeling sick while at home. Some symptoms of the virus look identical to other illnesses like the cold or flu, and this test tells us whether a symptomatic student has COVID-19 or not. This is a rapid test, and we receive the results of this test within 15 minutes. If a student has minimal symptoms and tests negative, they can remain in school.

Routine COVID safety checks minimize disruption to learning by helping us catch potential spread of the virus before it starts. Each student administers the safety check on a weekly basis. Samples are collected at school in groups of 5-10 individuals. The samples are group together at school OR in the lab. Once the samples get to the lab, all the samples in the group are tested for COVID-19 together. In almost all cases, it will take less than 24 hours to receive safety check

results. Students can continue to come to school while awaiting safety check results; they do not need to quarantine while awaiting results. If a safety check test is positive, the lab will automatically process each individual sample to determine which student(s) in the group produced the positive test.

Test and stay allows students who have had close contact with a person who tested positive for COVID-19 while at school to stay in school if the student is not showing symptoms. Instead of needing to quarantine and miss school, these students will take a daily rapid test while they remain in school as long as they are not symptomatic. Students participate in test and stay for at least five days after they may have been exposed.

If a student tests positive for COVID-19, they must quarantine at home for the CDC-recommended ten days since symptoms appeared or ten days since the positive test before returning to school. The student must also be without a fever for 24 hours.

Although students who are vaccinated are much less likely to spread or contract the virus, it is important for us to create an inclusive environment for both vaccinated and unvaccinated students.

To participate in the program, you must sign this consent form on behalf of your student. There is no charge for participating. If you have additional questions regarding the program, please contact Lisa Safron at lsafron@northampton-k12.us , 413-587-1364..

It is our hope that these measures will work together to keep our schools safe and your student in school. Thanks again for your support during this challenging time. We look forward to welcoming your students back to the classroom.

Sincerely,

Northampton Public School District