



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Tony Evers, Governor
Karen E. Timberlake, Secretary

September 13, 2021

Dear Wisconsin School Administrators,

I write today with an urgent request. We all share the same goal: a safe and enriching school year for every Wisconsin student. The large majority of school-age children are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and cases in children and adolescents are on the rise [in Wisconsin](#) and [across the nation](#). Overall, our [seven-day average of cases](#) continues to increase, and our [hospital capacity](#) is being stretched. Partnerships between schools and local and tribal health departments, as well as between DHS and DPI, have strengthened our pandemic response because we all share the same vision for a state where everyone can thrive and learn. It is time to build even further on these partnerships. Let's come together and do all that we can to protect Wisconsin's children.

We have many tools to protect students, teachers, and staff in Wisconsin's schools. We must use all of these tools as layered prevention strategies, and they must be used consistently and universally. These layered prevention strategies include:

- promoting vaccination
- requiring masking and physical distancing
- providing testing
- requiring isolation and quarantine
- ensuring that students and staff with symptoms stay home
- improving ventilation, cleaning, and disinfection
- maintaining communication with your local or tribal health department.

Using this layered approach will help keep Wisconsin students healthy and in school.

[Vaccination is one of the best tools](#) we have to stop the spread of COVID-19. Considering that children under the age of 12 are not yet eligible for the vaccine, it is imperative that those of us who can get vaccinated do our part and do so now. Encourage your teachers, school staff, and families, including children age 12 and up, to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Masks should be required for all students, teachers, school staff, and visitors; everyone in your school building needs to be wearing a mask unless there is a medical or safety reason, such as a disability that prevents them from wearing one safely.

Testing is essential in our response to the pandemic. Routine screening testing is important because it enables the early detection of asymptomatic students, teachers, and staff, making it possible for them to isolate and their close contacts quarantine more quickly, and preventing the further spread of the virus within your school. [Enrollment is still open](#) for the [K-12 School COVID-19 Testing Program](#), and I encourage you to add your school to the list of districts taking this important step.

After a positive test result, it is important to send the student, teacher, or staff member home with isolation instructions and to connect with your local or tribal health department to identify and notify their close contacts so they can **quarantine**. While a 14-day quarantine remains the safest approach, schools can also consider using a seven-day quarantine with a COVID-19 test collected on day six or seven after exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. If that test is negative, the

student or staff member can return to school if they continue to wear a mask and monitor for symptoms for 14 days. Appropriate physical distancing should be maintained whenever possible when using shortened quarantine. Additionally, if a close contact is fully vaccinated, they do not have to quarantine as long as they wear a mask and monitor for symptoms for 14 days.

Ventilation in the school should maximize the introduction of outdoor air and the filtration of indoor air in order to dilute and remove any infectious aerosols. Daily cleaning of high touch surfaces should be incorporated into the janitorial routine, and need to occur more frequently in spaces that are used by students and staff at increased risk for severe illness. Rooms where there has been an ill student, teacher, or staff member, or someone who tested positive for COVID-19, should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible.


While this is not new information, I appreciate the opportunity to share it with you as the new Wisconsin State Health Officer. In this role, it is incumbent on me to make sure you understand the urgency of the current situation. Despite having safe and effective vaccines and a greater understanding of this virus and the layered protection strategies that can keep our children safe, we have more cases today than we did at this same time last year. We know these layered protection strategies work to reduce transmission in schools, but they only work if we use them. Please use them.

I know these decisions can create tension and that many of us are faced with hostility when we take these actions and put these layered prevention strategies into place. Taking these actions is imperative for the safety of our students and educators. I echo State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly in [saying that our schools unite us](#) in this state, and that we can all do our part to keep them open and safe for in-person learning. I appreciate the work that school leaders across our state are doing and will continue to do to use these layered prevention strategies and work with your local or tribal health department to keep families informed. This is how we ensure our state is a place where every student can thrive.

We also know that as we learn more, our Federal, State, and Local governments and partners need to stay nimble to ensure we keep up with the best available information. Please go to the [DHS website](#) to stay up to date with the best available information and guidance that we have, including as we learn more about the recent announcements from the White House.

Thank you for your continued leadership and dedication to keeping Wisconsin students, teachers, and staff safe and in school. In Wisconsin, we take care of each other, and we believe in our schools and in protecting the health and safety of every single person in our state. Thank you for your help in acting on this shared vision, and making this school year a safe and enriching one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paula Tran', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Paula Tran
Wisconsin State Health Officer
Division Administrator, Division of Public Health
Wisconsin Department of Health Services