



STATE OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

LANSING

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GOVERNOR

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MDHHS and MDE send letter to school superintendents; urges schools to take measures upon return from winter breaks

LANSING, Mich. – The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and Michigan Department of Education (MDE) are sending a letter to superintendents urging schools to reinforce actions that can help alleviate the risks associated with this COVID-19 pandemic — particularly in anticipation of the highly transmissible omicron variant. Implementing prevention measures will protect students, teachers and staff, and will help maintain in-person learning.

The guidance is intended to keep school buildings open and allow students and staff to return to school safely after winter break.

MDHHS continues to reinforce that vaccination remains the best public health measure to protect Michiganders from COVID-19. Children ages 5 and up are eligible to be vaccinated. Schools should encourage all who are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine and booster dose, and where possible host vaccine clinics to facilitate access for students, families, teachers and staff.

The most effective way to prevent transmission within school buildings and reduce prolonged disruptions to in-person learning is to layer multiple prevention strategies as recommended by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“Our priority has remained keeping students safe,” said MDHHS director Elizabeth Hertel. “Children ages 5 and older now can get vaccinated. In addition to vaccination, we strongly recommend universal masking for students, teachers and staff. We have the tools to keep Michiganders safe, and we must continue to use them.”

The CDC and MDHHS strongly recommend universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students and visitors (age 2 and older), regardless of vaccination status. As Michigan remains in high community transmission, [universal indoor masking](#) is a critical prevention strategy for all school districts to allow students to maintain in-person learning. Mask use has been proven to substantially reduce transmission in school settings.

MDHHS also recommends regular testing in all school settings. Frequent testing can help identify infected people, including those without symptoms who may be contagious, so measures can be taken to prevent further transmission or outbreaks. To support schools that incorporate COVID-19 testing into their safer school prevention plans, MDHHS is offering rapid antigen testing to K-12 schools through the [MI Safe Schools Testing Program](#). To take

advantage of this program, schools and school districts [should follow this process when submitting rapid antigen test orders.](#)

Schools can participate in the MI Backpack Program, which offers free at-home COVID-19 tests to students, their families, teachers, and school staff. School districts interested in participating in this program can [fill out this form.](#)

As omicron variant cases are anticipated to increase in Michigan, it is important for all schools to review their planned activities for events and gatherings. MDHHS advises modifications to planned activities during and after school where the ability to maintain social distancing between people who live in different households cannot be maintained. Large gatherings (involving 100 or more people) should be held using remote technology or postponed, if not essential. Large gatherings would include events with large numbers of people from multiple households such as conferences or meetings, sporting events, and concerts.

Wearing masks, washing hands often, maintaining social distance wherever possible, and getting staff and students vaccinated all remain important safety measures. All prevention strategies provide some level of protection, and layered strategies implemented at the same time provide the greatest level of protection.

If you have any questions or concerns, please email MDHHS-COVIDTestingSupport@michigan.gov.

For more information, visit Michigan.gov/Coronavirus.

To find a vaccine, visit VaccineFinder.org.

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