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Memo

To: Pre K-12 School Administrators

From: Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH)

Date: May 19, 2022

Subject: Mitigation Strategies for High COVID-19 Community Level

Mirroring increases being seen throughout the region and country, the COVID-19 [community levels](#) in four Rhode Island counties are now designated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as “high” – Bristol County, Kent County, Providence County, and Washington County.

Each week the CDC identifies the COVID-19 community level in every county in the country as “low,” “medium,” or “high” using case rates and data on hospital admissions and percentage of hospital beds occupied by COVID-19 patients. Rhode Island has seen increases in these areas in the last several weeks, including increases in cases among school-age children. Many clusters of cases have been associated with extracurricular events, such as theater or drama programs and field trips. (K-12 data, including data by school, is [available online](#).) However, Rhode Island’s case data and hospitalization levels are still considerably lower than they have been at prior points in the pandemic. We have the tools, resources, and experience to effectively manage temporary increases in cases and keep children learning in school safely.

In line with CDC recommendations, and as outlined in the Pre K-12 Outbreak Response [Playbook](#), RIDOH recommends that schools in counties in CDC’s “high” tier take the following mitigation steps:

- Implement universal indoor masking policies;
- Ensure that all students and staff adhere to [isolation and quarantine protocols](#), including wearing a well-fitting mask on days 6-10 when attending school in person after COVID-19 infection;
- Offer Test to Stay (TTS) school-based quarantine for close contacts who aren’t exempt;
- Scale up testing programs and capacity to either provide or facilitate access to symptomatic testing and offering universal screening testing;
- Implement physical distancing and cohorting when possible; and
- Consider extra mitigation steps for events:
 - Hold events outdoors when possible;
 - Screen attendees for COVID-19 symptoms before entry; and
 - Use venues with robust circulation and ventilation systems and increase the quality of ventilation by opening windows and doors in the facility.

Information on testing

School testing programs remain essential to detecting COVID-19 early and preventing outbreaks. Schools have broad access to antigen tests, self-test kits, and testing support through grants. Additionally, a new supply of rapid antigen tests are now available to all schools, regardless of ELC grant status. Tests can be administered by your school's trained test administrator for all students whose parent/guardian has consented. Tests can also be sent home with students to be administered at home. To request rapid antigen test kits, email ridoh.covidk12testing@health.ri.gov. Please include the following information in your request:

- Number of tests requested (not kits, boxes, cases, etc.);
- Date for pick up. The distribution center is open on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.; and
- Point of contact with a phone number or email.

There are many places where Rhode Islanders can get free COVID-19 testing. COVID-19 testing is widely available at local pharmacies, primary care offices, and clinics in your community. People can also do self-tests at home. Self-tests are available at local pharmacies and through online retailers. Private health insurers are required to cover the cost of up to eight tests per month. Check your insurance company's policy to see how you can get reimbursed or if you need to file a claim.

Federal programs, like the [Increased Community Access to Testing \(ICATT\) Program](#) or the [Test to Treat Program](#), are available to support access to COVID-19 testing for people with and without health insurance. Tests are free to those without insurance. Everyone can order free test kits online by visiting covidtests.gov.

For a full list of public testing options, visit covid.ri.gov/testing.

Information about summer programs

Schools can find updated COVID-19 health and safety information and resources for summer programs [here](#).

If you are planning to operate summer camps during the summer of 2022, **please complete the short survey by May 30th** found [here](#). Camps administrators who complete the survey will help enable a fast and efficient response to outbreaks or other support from RIDOH as needed.

Contact RIDOH with any questions at RIDOH.COVIDK12Questions@health.ri.gov.