

APS Revised Masking Recommendation: Background



- Wednesday, February 16th, 2022, the Arlington Board of Health lifted the Town of Arlington Masking Requirement for public spaces.
- Effective Monday, February 28th, the DESE mask requirement for schools was lifted across the state, at which point masking requirements in schools became a local decision.
- Effective Friday, February 25th, CDC no longer recommends universal masking in schools or on school transportation, but still requires universal masking on public transportation.
- Effective Friday, February 25th, CDC issues new “community level” tool to help guide decision-making about necessity of COVID-19 restrictions based on “hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area,” and recommends that case rates no longer be as heavily weighted in determinations about COVID-19 restrictions at the local level.

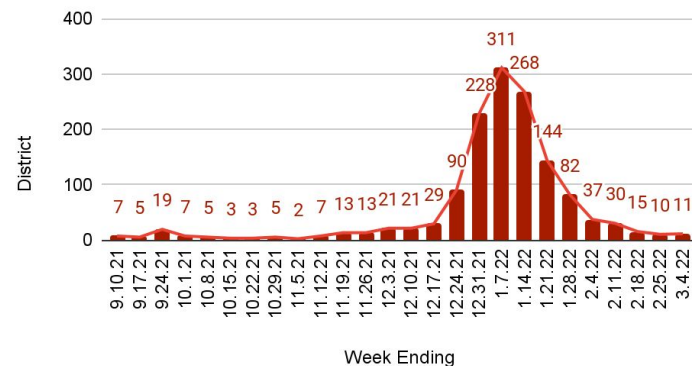
Per the CDC’s new risk calculation tool, Middlesex County is considered to have LOW levels of COVID-19.

APS Revised Masking Recommendation: Data



1. APS vaccination rates for eligible students range from 85-94%;
2. The APS staff vaccination rate is 97.9%;
3. Approximately 70% of all APS students & staff are participating in weekly PCR pool testing;
4. The number of positive pools and cases in the schools, town, county, and state have dramatically decreased;
5. 80% of students and staff are participating in the at-home testing program; and
6. COVID-19 levels in our area have reached their lowest levels since July of 2021, according to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority.

APS COVID Cases



APS Revised Masking Recommendation: Details



Effective March 7th, 2022, masks will be optional for all students and staff in the Arlington Public Schools, except in the following situations, where masks will continue to be required:

1. All staff at Menotomy Preschool and APS Daycares, *except when instructionally appropriate and beneficial for staff to remove masks, based on staff's professional judgment;*
2. All students at Menotomy Preschool and APS Daycares who are between the ages of 2-5 and are able to wear masks. Families may apply and qualify for a [special mask exemption](#) for their student at Menotomy Preschool and APS Daycares. **The masking requirements at Menotomy Preschool and in APS Daycares will be revisited at least monthly;**
3. On all school buses and transportation vans through at least the month of March;
4. In all school health offices and medical waiting rooms; and
5. For COVID-19 positive individuals who return to school as part of our test-to-return program during days 6-10, except when eating, drinking, or outdoors.

APS Revised Masking Recommendation: Continued Mitigation



The following APS COVID-19 mitigation measures will continue:

1. Weekly pooled testing;
2. In-school and at-home symptomatic testing;
3. [APS Test-to-return](#) for individuals who test positive for COVID-19;
4. [APS At-home Testing Program](#);
5. Regular replacement of MERV-13 air filters on all air filtration systems in our schools (filters last replaced in January 2022, and will be replaced again in April 2022); and
6. Use of stand-alone HEPA air filters in all instructional spaces.

All students and staff should continue to report positive COVID-19 results on the [APS COVID-19 Reporting Form](#).

APS Revised Masking Recommendation: Continued Mitigation



Throughout the pandemic, APS has utilized various strategies when outbreaks have occurred in our schools. We are defining an “outbreak” as a localized instance of multiple cases in a single classroom or school, with evidence of school-based person-to-person transmission. Each time there is an outbreak, we collaborate with the Arlington Department of Health and Human Services and on occasion DESE to determine next steps. It is our intention to avoid imposing additional restrictions and to avoid actions that result in loss of time in school; however, in the event it becomes necessary, **APS will keep the following tools in our “COVID-19 Outbreak Response Toolbox:”**

- The ability to flexibly re-impose masking restrictions when the alternative may be missed days of school for students in a classroom or school where an outbreak occurs;
- The ability to flexibly re-impose physical distancing and cohorting restrictions in individual classrooms, lunch rooms, or schools;
- The ability to repeat-test consented students in classrooms where outbreaks occur; and
- As a last resort, the ability to close a classroom or school when ventilation is compromised or when outbreaks occur.

APS Revised Masking Recommendation: Supporting Students and Staff



- Talking points and suggestions were shared with administrators on Tuesday 3/1;
- Building and Department administrators are working with with social work, guidance, and nursing teams at their schools to adapt and provide these resources to teachers and answer questions;
- Talking points include, but are not limited to:
 - Masks will soon be optional to wear.
 - Some people are comfortable with the option of removing their mask, while others are not.
 - There may be multiple reasons why individuals choose one option over the other.
 - We need to be respectful & accepting of everyone's personal choices.
 - People may choose to wear their masks sometimes and remove them other times.
 - We should not judge an individual's choice or pressure someone to choose a certain way.
 - The science and professional organizations tell us it is safe for those to choose to remove their masks.
 - If you are ever unsure about your own choice or want to talk to someone about the change in choices, your teachers, nurses, and social workers are always happy to talk with you.