

Minnesota Students and Families,

My name is Heather Mueller, and I am Minnesota's Commissioner of Education. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your partnership and perseverance throughout the pandemic. Since the moment the pandemic began, you have given your energy, time, and support to your children and our educators while also navigating the challenges that COVID-19 has brought to your lives. In March of 2020, no one could have predicted that COVID-19 and the Delta variant would still be affecting classrooms across Minnesota as the 2021-22 school year began. We have learned a lot since the beginning of the pandemic, and our priorities remain the same: first, maintaining the safety, health and wellness of our students, staff and families; and second, ensuring students can stay in their classrooms for safe in-person learning.

To meet these priorities this school year, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has again partnered with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) to support schools as they implement best practice strategies to minimize the spread of COVID-19, ensure access to COVID-19 testing, and promote COVID-19 vaccines for eligible Minnesotans.

### **Health Best Practice Recommendations for Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Schools**

The experts at MDH have provided Best Practice Recommendations for COVID-19 Prevention in Schools (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/schoolrecs.pdf>), which align with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance. School leaders and school boards are strongly recommended to require these best practices to protect safe in-person learning. The practices emphasize layered mitigation strategies including:

- Universal masking
- Students/staff staying home when ill
- Students/staff who test positive for COVID-19 staying home for 10 days after symptoms started or 10 days from testing if asymptomatic
- Contact tracing, quarantining of close contacts
- Notification of families when an exposure occurs
- Regular COVID-19 testing for staff and students
- Physical distancing

### **COVID-19 School Testing Program**

Minnesota is offering free testing options for schools to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and keep students in their classrooms. The state has also provided funds to schools through a COVID-19 testing grant program. These grants support local testing efforts with funding for staffing, supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE), and more.

### **COVID-19 Vaccines for Students and Families**

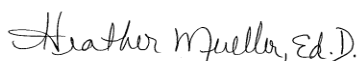
Vaccines remain the best tool we have in fighting COVID-19. Recently, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children ages 5 and older. This is an exciting time as it means more of our students will be able to get vaccinated. Families may have questions about the COVID-19 vaccine. MDH has answers at [mn.gov/vaxforkids](https://mn.gov/vaxforkids) where you can also find where to get the vaccine. COVID-19 vaccines are free for Minnesotans.

To learn about your school's COVID-19 plan, visit: <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/covid19/health/test/>

If you have specific questions or concerns about your school's health and safety strategies, you should reach out to your building principal, superintendent, charter school director or school board.

Thank you, again, for all you've done to support your child and your school community throughout the pandemic. Together we will continue to keep our students in their classrooms so they have the school experience they deserve.

Sincerely,



Heather Mueller, Ed.D.  
Commissioner