



Franklin Public Schools - Communication of COVID-19 Cases

September 2020

Dear Franklin Community,

As we return to school for the 2020-2021 school year, the Franklin Public Schools (FPS) wishes to proactively communicate to families our protocols and communication plan to respond to three specific scenarios: a report of a positive COVID-19 case, an alleged threat, and an incident of hate or bias. FPS is committed to ensuring a safe and nurturing educational environment for our students, staff, and community. Often, during an incident, our communication may be limited in order to protect the confidentiality of the individuals involved. Our intent is that by providing a preview of what to expect with communication prior to an incident, the community is informed and more confident about our protocols in advance. These messages will be sent in three separate letters. The first in the series is about our response to a positive COVID-19 case within the school community.

Response When Informed of a COVID-19 Positive Case

Our first responsibility as we begin this school year is to keep our students, teachers, and staff safe. We have spent the summer months getting the school building and staff ready to execute all of the safety guidelines and best practices based on guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the medical community. From sanitizing and utilizing space in new and different ways to purchasing PPE for staff and extra masks for students who might lose or forget theirs, we have been working hard to make sure our school buildings are as safe as possible. This year, like never before, will require a partnership between schools and families to ensure that everyone is wearing their masks, washing their hands, and distancing physically. However, the most important thing you can do as a parent/caregiver is to keep students at home at the first sign of a symptom or exposure to the virus. Similarly, staff should stay home when not feeling well.

Our planning process has included thinking ahead about what we will do and how we will communicate should a student or staff member show symptoms at school or test positive for COVID-19. We want to share those with you in advance so that you have a clear understanding of what to expect. While some specifics may vary depending on the situation, there are some common steps that will be taken if someone in our school community is symptomatic, comes in contact with an affected person, or tests positive:

- Evaluate the person's symptoms
- Separate them from others
- Clean and disinfect spaces visited by the person
- Test for COVID-19 and stay at home while awaiting results
- If the test is positive:
 - o Remain at home for at least 10 days **and** until at least 24 hours have passed with no fever (without the use of fever-reducing medications) and improvement in other symptoms.
 - o Watch symptoms
 - o Notify the school nurse and personal close contacts

- Answer the call from the local board of health or Massachusetts Community Tracing Collaborative to identify close contacts and help them prevent transmission
- Secure release from contact tracers (local board of health or Community Tracing Collaborative) for return to school
- Any students or staff who were close contacts will be notified immediately
- If the test is negative for someone who was a close contact of someone who tested positive:
 - They can return to school after the required 14-day self-quarantine period.
- If the test is negative for a person who is symptomatic but was *not* in close contact with someone who tested positive:
 - They can return to school once 24 hours have passed with no fever and improvement in symptoms without the use of fever-reducing medications.

For more information on COVID-19 symptoms and testing, please visit: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/about-covid-19-testing#where-can-get-a-test?>

For families: please contact your child's school nurse immediately if you or someone in your home begins to show the following symptoms:

- Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills or shaking chills
- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as a chronic cough)
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Headache when in combination with other symptoms
- Muscle aches or body aches
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Fatigue, when in combination with other symptoms
- Congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies), when in combination with other symptoms

The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to keep your children home (and for staff to stay home) when they don't feel well or when they demonstrate any of the above symptoms. We are committed to continuous communication with our school community and will continue to update you if cases occur.

Communication about a COVID-19 Positive Case In the School Community

FPS and/or a specific school will write to inform staff and families that a person in the school community has tested positive for COVID-19. Because our first responsibility is to keep our students and staff safe, we are planning for this scenario during our reopening planning process and have a comprehensive plan in place to sanitize the school, inform staff who were at risk of exposure or in close contact, inform families whose students were at risk of exposure or in close contact, and support the affected staff member/family as they navigate this stressful experience.

We will not be able to provide specific information about a school community member who tests positive. We will communicate with specific staff as well as individual families about whether or not the staff member or your child was determined to be a close contact (defined as being within 6 feet of the person for at least 15 minutes) of the affected school member. In all circumstances, even if not identified as a close contact, we ask that staff and families continue to monitor themselves (staff)/their children (families) for symptoms (see above). Staff and students should stay home if they show any symptoms or are not feeling well.

Staff members in close contact with the affected school community member and parents/guardians of students who were in close contact with the school community member will be notified privately. All close contacts should be tested but must self-quarantine for 14 days after the last exposure to the person who tested positive, regardless of the test result. We are also following all Department of Health protocols, including collaborating with our local board of health to complete contact tracing. Additionally, we are asking those parents/guardians whose students are tested for COVID-19 to please report the results to the school nurse. Staff members should report the results to their supervisor. We are working hard to understand the impact of the virus on our school community, and this information is a critical piece of that puzzle.

In addition to our updated and on-going cleaning and disinfecting practices, to further prevent transmission of the virus to other staff and students, in the event of a positive COVID-19 case, we will sanitize the school with a focus on those areas frequented by the school community member that tested positive. We will continue to be vigilant in adhering to all of the Universal Health and Safety practices that we are putting in place in an effort to continue to keep schools open. We will continue to provide remote learning for all students required to quarantine at home to continue to provide instruction, structure, and an emotional connection to the classroom during a time that we know will be challenging for those children and families involved. It is important that the community understand and support each other during quarantine circumstances so that all understand that this process is designed to keep everyone in our community safe, as opposed to assuming that any individual has contracted the virus.

Communication to Close Contacts

As noted above, we will communicate privately and directly to staff members and students' families if a person in our school community has tested positive for COVID-19, and a staff member or student was a close contact of the school community member. A close contact is defined as only those who have been within 6 feet of distance of the individual for at least fifteen minutes, in other school spaces, on the bus, or at an extracurricular activity.

If this circumstance arises, we strongly encourage staff members to be tested and inform their supervisor. We encourage families, as well, to have their child tested and to report the results to their school nurse. As noted earlier, we are working hard to understand the impact of the virus on our school community, and this information is a critical piece of that puzzle. However, if an individual prefers not to be tested, they will be required to remain home in self-quarantine for 14 days from exposure. We will also follow all Department of Health protocols, including collaborating with our local board of health to complete contact tracing. We ask for cooperation from staff and families in this effort, as well.

Even if a school community member who was a close contact tests negative, they must still remain home in self-quarantine for 14 days from exposure. We will communicate the date of exposure. We will provide remote learning opportunities to the student.

If a school community member who was a close contact tests positive, they may return to school after 10 days of isolation, if he/she/they:

1. have gone for 24 hours without a fever (without taking fever-reducing medications like Tylenol); and

2. have experienced an improvement in other symptoms (for example, their cough has gotten much better); and
3. have received clearance from public health authority contact tracers (the local board of health or Community Tracing Collaborative).

It is important that the community understand these protocols and not make assumptions about any individual. FPS is committed to preventing discrimination and harassment of school community members who may test positive or be presumed positive for COVID-19. The District will address concerns that are raised and take appropriate remedial action if warranted.

Mobil Rapid Response Units

DESE and the Department of Public Health (DPH) have created an option where local school officials, in consultation with public health authorities, will be able to request a state-sponsored mobile rapid response unit to test a group of students and/or staff when a potential cluster of COVID-19 cases has been identified and transmission appears to have occurred within the school.

FPS will collaborate with the local board of health if it appears that there is evidence that COVID-19 transmission is likely to have occurred within a classroom or school within a 14-day period of time. The following are the minimum conditions, as determined by the Department of Public Health:

- Within a 14-day period, if two or more individuals within a single classroom test positive for COVID-19 and transmission/exposure is likely to have occurred in the classroom, a mobile rapid response unit may be deployed for all asymptomatic individuals within that classroom;
- Within a 14-day period, if 3 or more individuals or 3 percent, whichever is greater, of a given grade or cohort test positive for COVID-19 and transmission/exposure, likely occurred in school, a mobile rapid response unit may be deployed for all asymptomatic individuals within that grade or cohort;
- Within a 14-day period, if more than 3 percent of a school tests positive for COVID-19 and transmission/exposure likely occurred in the school, a mobile testing unit may be deployed for the entire school population that is asymptomatic;
- Within a 14-day period, if 2 or more individuals within the same bus test positive for COVID-19 and transmission/exposure likely occurred on the bus, a mobile rapid response unit may be deployed for all asymptomatic individuals on that bus.

If the criteria is met, FPS will inform staff and families/students that the option for mobile on-site testing exists and might be needed. Logistics of the testing protocols will be communicated in advance; this will include parent/guardian permission forms for the testing of students. The Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent will serve as the school-based point of contact should this resource need to be utilized.

Communication will be sent to relevant staff and families from the classroom, school, or bus. This communication will describe the situation, including the number of cases, the purpose of the mobile rapid response, and information that close contacts would already have been notified. The communication will also include the logistics of testing, including date, time, and location. Families must provide written approval for testing of children under the age of 18, and parents/guardians may accompany their child on the day of testing. The communication will also explain how families may choose not to have their child tested and that their child

will not be required to quarantine and may return to school unless additional cases were identified and their child is determined to have been a close contact (see definition above).

The school community will also be notified about the plan for mobile rapid response testing.

FPS will also communicate with DESE whenever a positive COVID-19 case occurs. Applicable privacy laws for staff and students apply, and FPS will not disclose any confidential information.

Additional information, including summarizing graphics, can be found on our reopening website in the Health Office Information section: <https://sites.google.com/franklinps.net/returntoschoolplan/health-office-information>

Additionally, information regarding decisions regarding **potential school closures** due to COVID-19 positive cases as well as **decision-making metrics** among instructional models can be found in the [COVID-addendum](#) of school handbooks, which are being issued within the first weeks of school.

Sincerely,
Franklin Public Schools

Please submit any questions you have regarding this letter to reopening@franklinps.net for a response or for inclusion in the FAQs on our [Reopening Website](#).