



Health  
Department



**TO:** Northern Virginia School Superintendents and Leaders  
**FROM:** Northern Virginia Health Directors  
**DATE:** December 30, 2021  
**RE:** NOVA COVID-19 Mitigation Recommendations

The Northern Virginia Health Directors share your commitment to maintain in-person instruction and reduce disease transmission during this pandemic. Limiting COVID-19 germ spread minimizes staff and student absenteeism, which maximizes children’s education and the protection of the health and well-being of your school communities.

The emergence of variants – such as Omicron – and surges in community infection increases the risk of in-school transmission and underscores the importance of maximizing use of multiple mitigation measures during instruction to optimally reduce transmission risk while continuing with vital in-school instruction.

You gain the most reduction in COVID-19 transmission risk inside your schools when you use the following mitigation measures in a layered approach, as no one single measure is perfect:

1. Vaccination remains the best way to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, or death from COVID-19. It does not eliminate all infections.
2. Physical distancing is effective in preventing transmission. It is understood that six-foot distancing may not always be practical in the school setting.
3. Testing when sick and after close contact is an effective method to detect infection and isolate. Access to timely testing is limited at present.
4. Isolation and quarantine can further slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Asymptomatic transmission results in exposures in close contacts.
5. Indoor masking in public or shared settings with non-household members – such as in school buildings – is effective. This is particularly valuable where communities are experiencing substantial or high levels of disease transmission.

While we strongly recommend all of these layers, we want to stress the importance of maintaining universal indoor masking in our schools. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K – 12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) also supports universal masking noting that “face masks can be safely worn by all children 2 years of age and older, including the vast majority of children with underlying health conditions, with rare exception” and that “children 2 years of age and older have demonstrated their ability to wear a face mask.”<sup>1</sup>

Masking has the added advantage of being a measure which can be universally adhered to and can be enforced in-school to limit transmission of COVID-19. The Northern Virginia Health Directors strongly recommend schools continue to ensure universal masking, in accordance with guidance from [the CDC](#).

We appreciate your continuing partnership in keeping schools safe for in-person learning, which benefits everyone in our communities, most especially our children.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/cloth-face-coverings/>