

**Westford Public Schools
Frequently Asked Questions
August 2021**

Will students and staff have to wear masks at school this year?

Per the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education's vote on Tuesday, August 24, masks will be worn by all staff, students (except those with specified medical or behavioral exemptions), and volunteers while indoors at school and/or school-related activities, at least until October 1.

Will students get "mask breaks" during the day?

Yes. Similar to last year, PK-12 students will have opportunities for mask breaks throughout the day. At the high school level, we will return to five minutes between classes so students are encouraged to take mask breaks during the transition if time allows. Otherwise, students are welcome to find a convenient time during class to properly distance themselves from peers and remove their masks for a brief mask break.

Do individuals need to maintain physical distance in school this year?

There are no physical distancing requirements in place this year, even during meals. However, we encourage individuals to distance as feasible, use outdoor spaces as much as possible, and provide at least 3' of distancing during snack/mealtimes.

What will school lunches be like this year?

Lunch will be free for all students in the 2021-2022 school year. Students who choose to participate in our lunch program will go through the typical lunch lines in the cafeteria and we will return to our typical "hot lunch" options. Principals are setting up their individual sites for students to be spaced at least 3' apart during mealtime, when masks are off. Many students will have opportunities to eat lunch outdoors, as appropriate based on the age of students, the specific building sites, and the weather conditions each day.

What will classroom set-ups look like?

We will be returning to our flexible seating arrangements in schools. Classroom set-ups will look similar to how they looked prior to the pandemic.

Will the schools be administering COVID tests to students?

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has provided various testing models to districts, free of charge. We have applied for the following two testing models and anticipate incorporating these this year. **Please note that a parental/guardian consent form will be sent home at the beginning of the school year and signed consent is required in order for students to be tested.**

- 1) **Test & Stay:** This test is intended for school-based close contacts only. If an asymptomatic student is identified as a close contact due to close proximity at school to a student who tested positive, the close contact may receive the BinaxNow test each morning in school for a minimum of five consecutive days (seven days total). Results are received within fifteen minutes and each day the child has a negative test, they may participate in the school day and will remain masked. During snack/mealtimes the mask may be removed but the student must remain at least 3' away from other students.

- 2) Symptomatic Testing: If a student develops mild/isolated symptoms **while at school**, the medical staff may administer the BinaxNow test to the student. If, after fifteen minutes, the result is negative the child may return to class. While we applied for this testing model, we may roll out this option later into the school year.

If my child has a mild symptom, may I send them to school since there are COVID tests available?

No. Like last year, we ask families to keep their children home when they are showing any symptoms. If/when the Symptomatic Testing model is rolled out, the tests are available only to students (with signed parent/guardian consent) who develop a symptom **during the school day**.

If I do not sign the parental/guardian consent form for testing, will a COVID test be administered to my child at school?

No. The school will only administer the test to students who submitted a signed parental consent form and meet the testing criteria mentioned above.

What qualifies as a “close contact” and what quarantining is expected if my child is identified as one?

Close contacts are defined as individuals who have been within 6 feet of a COVID-19 positive individual while indoors, for at least 15 minutes during a 24-hour period. Please note that the at-risk exposure time begins 48 hours prior to symptom onset (or time of positive test if asymptomatic) and continues until the time the COVID-19 positive individual is isolated.

However, certain close contacts are exempted from testing and quarantine response protocols as noted below.

Close contacts who are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols:

- Asymptomatic, fully vaccinated close contacts: Individuals who are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- Classroom close contacts: An individual who is exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual in the classroom while both individuals were masked, so long as the individuals were spaced at least 3 feet apart, is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- Bus close contacts: Individuals on buses must be masked according to federal requirements. As such, individuals who are masked on buses when windows are open are exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols.
- Close contacts who have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days: An individual who has been previously diagnosed with COVID-19 and then becomes a close contact of someone with COVID-19 is exempt from testing and quarantine response protocols if:
 - The exposure occurred within 90 days of the onset of their own illness AND
 - The exposed individual is recovered and remains without COVID-19 symptoms.

What if my child must quarantine or isolate at home?

We will handle each child’s case individually. There may be instances when a child can participate in their classes/services remotely and other cases where there may be independent work assigned to them in Google Classroom.

Families will continue to follow procedures for notifying the school of any absence and providing medical documentation when appropriate. In the event that an absence is expected to exceed 14 school days due to the confinement order of a medical professional, families are asked to communicate with building principals.

Will extracurricular activities, before/after school care, and athletics be offered this year?

Yes. At this time, we plan to run normal activities. For now, while students are indoors they will be required to wear masks, similar to during the school day. There will continue to be a late bus at the middle and high schools.

Will parents be allowed to volunteer in the buildings this year if they have met all safety requirements (e.g. CORI)?

We will continue to try to minimize unnecessary foot traffic in the buildings, however, principals are able to invite volunteers into the school, as needed.

Will special education and 504 Team meetings be held virtual or in-person?

Westford will continue to offer Team meetings virtually. This method allows for full participation from all participants without the need to gather in small spaces. As with all mitigation strategies, this decision will be revisited periodically throughout the year.

What other mitigation strategies will be in place?

Hand sanitizing stations will continue to be available at various points throughout the schools. Staff members are encouraged to open windows in their rooms/offices, where feasible. Air purifiers are strategically placed in order to sanitize the air in rooms that don't have windows. New air filters were purchased and installed in schools last school year and they will continue to be replaced on an ongoing basis. Air quality in buildings will continue to be assessed on a weekly basis throughout the school year.