

Marlborough Elementary School COVID-19 Operating Plan  
Effective February 28, 2022  
[Updated 3.1.22 Per CDC Guidance Released on February 25, 2022](#)

Background: Transition to Mask-Optional

This update to MES operations and protocols has been made in consultation with the Chatham Health District, upon review of the Connecticut Department of Health's Guidance (published on February 18, 2022) *Transitioning to a Model of Routine Respiratory Disease Prevention and Enhanced Outbreak Management and Control for COVID-19 in PreK-12 School Settings* ([DPH link here](#)), and with our own school considerations in mind.

We have been closely monitoring our community and school rate of infection and the trend in state COVID hospitalizations. After surging in the early weeks of January, these numbers have been steadily trending downwards. Currently, there are very few positive cases being reported to school, as noted on our district COVID-19 Dashboard.

We have an ample supply of at-home test kits, helping to quickly identify and isolate positive cases. We also have an ample supply of high quality masks for staff use. We have also worked to make access to vaccination convenient by hosting a number of free clinics at MES, and will continue to consider offering additional clinics.

*Given the widespread availability of COVID-19 vaccines, at-home COVID-19 testing, medications to treat COVID-19, and our collective experience mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in our schools over the last two years, our communities can begin to transition the management of COVID-19 in schools from a pandemic emergency response toward a model that aligns with the public health approach to routine management and control of respiratory viral disease. When applied to the PreK-12 school setting, this model focuses more on response to clusters of cases, outbreaks, evidence of ongoing transmission in schools, and/or significant increases in community transmission risk. (DPH Guidance Document, February 18, 2022)*

Aligned with state DPH guidance and with these tools and trends in mind, **mask-wearing will be optional at MES beginning Monday, February 28, 2022**. While not mandatory, we support the DPH's recommendation that students and staff wear masks as a mitigation strategy while respecting each person's choice whether or not to.

We will continue to work closely with our state and local health departments and the State Department of Education to be adaptable in our decision-making. We are making this change to mask-optional cautiously and will closely monitor COVID-19 figures. We will not hesitate to consider a return to mandatory mask-wearing if the Commissioners of the DPH and SDE deem it necessary to reimpose a statewide mask mandate (primary indicator is increased hospitalizations as a major threat to the healthcare system) or local metrics become uniquely concerning (such as a local or school outbreak that poses a heightened risk to students, staff and families, as well as our ability to be fully staffed to remain open).

The DPH recommends that students and staff self-test just prior to going mask-optional. We will send a kit (containing two tests) home with each student in their backpack on Thursday, February 24th. Staff kits will be in school mailboxes. Ideally, one test should be performed at home in the morning prior to leaving for school on Monday, February 28th.

### General COVID-19 Public Health Guidance

In order to protect yourself, your children, and others from COVID-19:

- Avoid large indoor social gatherings if you are unvaccinated or at high risk for severe COVID-19 disease.
- Get vaccinated if you are eligible and have not already done so.
- Get a booster shot if you are eligible.
- Get tested for COVID-19 especially if you are sick, or as close as possible before gathering in large groups even if you feel well.
  - At-home tests are a convenient way to accomplish this.
  - At-home tests can be ordered online (now at no cost using [www.covidtest.gov](http://www.covidtest.gov)) and at many local pharmacies, and are eligible for reimbursement from health insurers.
- STAY HOME if you are sick or have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 5 days, and do not leave home (isolate) until at least 5 days have passed since your symptoms began or since you tested positive, and you are feeling much better, and you no longer have a fever.
- Wear a mask in crowded indoor public settings.

### MES COVID-19/Respiratory Disease Management Going Forward

*During times when COVID-19 metrics and/or other local conditions indicate that the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the community and schools is generally stable at a relatively low level, DPH advises that school districts may wish to transition to a routine disease prevention model for managing COVID-19 risk in the PreK-12 schools. (DPH Guidance Document, February 18, 2022)*

MES will employ what the DPH describes as “Routine Strategies” for COVID-19 prevention. Many of these routines have been in place at MES, and will continue or are revised as of February 28th as follows:

- Encourage COVID-19 vaccination.
- Support students and staff who choose to continue wearing a mask even when not required to.
  - We recommend that students and staff wear masks as a mitigation strategy and respect everyone’s choices whether or not to.
  - The school will not discriminate against any student or staff member who chooses to wear or not wear a mask, nor will we tolerate any criticism, bullying or harassment related to an individual’s choice as to mask-wearing. As always, our

classrooms are student-centered, friendly environments and we will not allow children to tease or target one another about their mask choice.

- Please note that our employees will not be checking, reminding, or managing students in regards to mask-wearing. We ask parents to please discuss their expectations for school mask-wearing with their children. We have masks available for those who need or forget them. (Please see *Tips For Talking with Children About Mask Choice* at the end of this document.)
- Staff have been advised to maintain a supportive atmosphere for all children by simply stating, “Wearing a mask in school is now an individual’s choice and we respect one another’s decisions.” Staff have been asked to minimize class disruption related to mask choice.
- We will not seat or group students according to their mask status.
- Recommend testing and masking for students and staff, following illness or known or potential exposures to COVID-19 cases.
- Continue to report cases which are reported to school to the CT DPH.
- Follow isolation guidelines for students and staff who have symptoms associated with, or have tested positive for, COVID-19. **Persons who test positive must isolate at home for at least five days since symptom onset or a positive test.** Individuals may return to school on day six if symptoms have markedly resolved (fever-free for at least 24 hours and other symptoms are significantly improved).
  - **As strongly emphasized by our local public health director, individuals should wear a mask upon return to school through day ten for the health and safety of others. Therefore for these students and staff, mask-wearing will be mandatory at school on days 6-10.** Parents have the option to keep their children home for 10 days instead of returning to school wearing a mask.
  - Students who have to isolate will be provided with at-home school work.
- Be prepared to respond quickly to rapid increases in cases in schools, in consultation with local public health officials including the potential need for mandatory universal masking for students and staff on a temporary basis as well as notifying families and staff of outbreaks at the school.

#### Additional MES COVID-19 Mitigation Measures This School Year

In addition to the procedures listed above, a number of COVID-19 practices will remain in place so that we don’t introduce other variables at the same time that we adjust to being mask-optional. We are also electing to keep certain operations in place to reduce disrupting routines that are functioning well this year. We will revisit these considerations as we proceed through the coming months.

- Students and staff should stay home if sick, particularly if experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19.
- Parents/guardians shall notify the school as soon as they become aware that their child has tested positive for COVID-19.

- Continue to notify specific families and staff when a positive case has been reported to school and the child or staff member may have been potentially exposed. The following email message will continue to be used for this purpose: *We were notified that an individual in your child's class has tested positive for COVID-19. The individual was last in school on (date). We are notifying you so that you can monitor your child for symptoms and consider testing. Your child can remain in school as long as they are asymptomatic and feeling well. Unless symptomatic or testing positive, your child does not need to quarantine or isolate based upon this notification.*
- Continue to post the number of cases reported to school daily (if any) on the school district website COVID-19 dashboard.
- Continue to practice good hand hygiene; hand-washing or sanitizing after bathroom use, prior to eating, and after nose-blowing or a messy sneeze or cough.
- In addition to distributing 1 kit/student and staff member at the start of mask-optional, MES will continue to distribute at-home test kits to students or staff who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms and need to be screened for COVID-19 and to students or staff who have had a direct exposure to an individual with COVID-19 while supplies last.

#### Additional MES Operation Decisions For the Coming Months

- Students will continue to have lunch as cohorts in their classrooms. It is likely that the return to the cafeteria will happen at the start of next school year.
- Snack break will return to normal at whatever time fits into the class's schedule.
- There will no longer be scheduled "mask breaks".
  - Students/Staff may remove their mask when they feel they need to.
  - Teachers will return to typical "movement breaks" as they deem appropriate.
- Student drop-off and pick-up will continue to take place at the Community Room location.
- We will not hold large group indoor assemblies or programs until further notice. We will hold off on indoor family events and will look forward to outdoor gatherings in the spring.
- We will restrict visitors to essential business only until further notice.

#### Tips for Talking With Children About Mask Choice

Let your child know that some children and adults will choose to wear masks in school and some will choose not to. You might say, "These are the choices we are making for our family and we respect the choices that others are making for themselves." It is advisable to limit how much is vocalized about other adult's decisions if they differ from your own.