

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**\*\*\* PRESS RELEASE \*\*\***

**SFDPH REAFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR IN-PERSON LEARNING DESPITE  
PRESENCE OF COVID-19 OMICRON VARIANT**

*Health and safety protocols have kept schools open despite the pandemic and are further encouraged as students and staff return to school following the holidays*

As families prepare for a return to school following the holidays, the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) reaffirms its support for the resumption of in-person learning despite rising COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant. Multiple layers of health and safety protocols have kept school settings open this year despite COVID-19, and SFDPH urges families and schools to continue following these recommendations to allow for a safer return to school.

“San Francisco has remained vigilant and beat back four surges, and we are well positioned with a highly vaccinated population to do the same with this current surge due to Omicron,” said Dr. Grant Colfax, San Francisco Director of Public Health. “Throughout the pandemic, San Francisco schools have remained low-risk settings by following proper safety protocols – let’s work together to keep it that way.”

Getting vaccinated and boosted, testing after travel and gatherings, staying home when sick, and wearing well-fitted masks are key to keeping schools open for in-person learning.

“I appreciate this guidance from our public health experts on the importance of keeping our students safely in the classroom,” said Mayor London Breed. “We know how hard the last two years have been on our kids, and we need to focus on what’s best to support them, while also putting policies in place to ensure that everyone in our schools is protected.”

When rates of COVID are high in our communities, cases will appear at schools, just as they do in other settings. However, with effective health protocols in place, the data shows that these multiple layers of defense can stop the spread of COVID in school settings.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently announced its support for an additional valuable tool in school settings as part of its layered prevention strategy called Test to Stay. Test to Stay combines contact tracing and COVID-19 testing that is repeated at least twice during a seven-day period post-exposure to allow asymptomatic school-associated close contacts who are not fully vaccinated and do not test positive for COVID-19 to continue in-person learning. Students who participate in Test to Stay should consistently and correctly wear masks while in school and should stay home and isolate if they develop symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.

SFDPH continues to support strategies that safely keep as many kids in schools, such as the CDC's Test to Stay tool, which is similar to the modified quarantine guidance that SFDPH supported and allowed since the beginning of the school year. More information on the modified quarantine guidance is available here: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/covid-19/isolation-and-quarantine.asp#school>.

“We must do everything possible to keep students safely attending schools,” said Dr. Susan Philip, San Francisco Health Officer. “The mental health impacts on students due to social isolation far outweigh the challenges of in-person learning.”

### **Safer Return to School Recommendations**

- **Testing**

- All students and staff are recommended to get tested for COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status 1-2 days before returning to school or work, even if they are asymptomatic.
- If families or staff have traveled over the holidays, SFDPH recommends testing 3-5 days after returning from travel.
- If any students or staff test positive, please notify your school immediately and follow isolation and quarantine guidelines: <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/COVID-19/Isolation-and-Quarantine.asp>. Individuals who need assistance with isolation can connect with the COVID Resource Center at (628) 217-6101.
- COVID-19 testing sites and resources: <https://sf.gov/find-out-about-your-covid-19-testing-options>
- San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) specific testing resources: <https://www.sfusd.edu/covid-19-response-updates-and-resources/covid-19-surveillance-testing-students/covid-19-testing-locations-and-dates>

- **Stay Home When Sick**

- Students, teachers and staff who have symptoms of infectious illness, such as COVID-19 or the flu, should stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care, regardless of vaccination status.

- **Vaccination**

- Everyone who is eligible (currently open to age 5 and above) for a COVID-19 vaccine should get vaccinated and stay up to date with boosters (currently open to age 16 and above if enough time has passed since their initial vaccination).
- COVID-19 vaccination sites and resources: <https://sf.gov/get-vaccinated-against-covid-19>

- **Face Coverings**

- A well-fitted mask that can be comfortably worn is most important.
- Double masking is an effective way to improve fit and filtration. A close-fitting cloth mask can be worn on top of a surgical/disposable mask to improve the seal of the mask to the face.

- Additional masking resources:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Get-the-Most-out-of-Masking.aspx>

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