



September 16, 2021

Dear Catholic School Parents and Guardians:

As we conclude the 3rd week of the new school year, thanks for your continued partnership and investment in a Catholic education for your children.

During these challenging times, we would like to provide an update on the status of the COVID-19 Delta variant across our 9 jurisdictions, clarify mask and quarantine guidance, and request your continued support, vigilance and discipline to promote the health and safety of your school community.

The State of Maryland continues to deal with the COVID-19 Delta variant. We monitor daily case volumes, the status of case transmission across our jurisdictions and the number of cases by age group, with a focus on 0-19 year olds.

The State of Maryland's number of COVID cases has averaged over 1000 cases/day for the past several weeks with an increasing percentage of the cases in the 0-19 age groups reaching a level of 32%. The resulting "7 Day Moving Average Case Rate per 100K" transmission rate across all 9 of our jurisdictions remains in the "Substantial / High" range. Therefore, we continue to mandate masking of our students, faculty and staff within our Catholic schools.

We realize there will be positive COVID cases that occur in our schools that are the result of exposure outside of the school. As such, we want to emphasize that we will take appropriate action, with your approval, to Rapid/PCR test your children and, if appropriate, following CDC/MDH/local health department guidance, we will ensure your child is directed to isolate, quarantine and/or follow-up with additional testing. Each of these measures is intended to mitigate the risk of spread of the virus in our school communities. Recently, the CDC and the Maryland Department of Health have modified contact tracing guidance as it relates to close contacts when those students identified are fully and properly masked during the period of exposure. Per the guidance issued by the CDC and adopted by the MDH, the contact tracing guidance provides the following:

- **Exception:** In the **K–12 indoor classroom** setting, the close contact definition **excludes** students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time.

In light of the new contact tracing exception, students meeting the above criteria are allowed to remain in school. Therefore, children who are not vaccinated, whether that it be by choice or ineligibility, will not be required to quarantine so long as both the infected student and the student within 3-6 feet are both masked.

However, children who have contact with a confirmed positive and are with the 3-6 feet while masked, are strongly urged to be tested no sooner than the third day from exposure, and no later than the fifth day from exposure. During the waiting period to be tested, your child must be masked, regardless of whether a masking mandate is in place at the school or not. If your child's test is negative, your child may continue to remain in school. If your child tests positive, they will be required to begin a 10-day period of isolation from the date the test was administered.

What we learned from educators and our experience last year is that trying to meet the needs of both in person and remote learners was challenging for the teacher and had an impact on learning for both remote and in person learners. We will be monitoring the use of asynchronous learning for extended absences, and will be monitoring data by school on a daily basis. If a substantial number of students are impacted as a result of contact tracing, synchronous virtual instruction will be provided to the class. Know that when your child is in person that 100% of the attention and energy of the teacher will be on your child and the students in the classroom.

As we move forward this school year, there have been questions about re-implementing the daily Health Wellness Form. We felt given our collective experience last year that we could count on the support and partnership of our parents and caregivers to monitor the health of their children and **all** household members (parents & siblings), as well as anyone your child has had contact with to not require this approach of a daily screening.

We reiterate, for the health and well-being of your school community, **PLEASE** do not expose members of the school community to a child who has been exposed to someone who is positive, is being tested for COVID, or is exhibiting COVID-19, RSV, or Influenza symptoms. You play a critical role in preventing exposure and community spread by keeping your child home when sick or if they have been in contact with a family member or someone else who is currently sick. Finally, think twice about sleepovers and other large indoor activities that can contribute to exposure to COVID positive children and adults.

We all must continue to remain vigilant and disciplined to maintain the progress that has been made to stop the spread of the COVID-19 Delta variant. Our ability to continue providing in-person instruction to your children and avoid quarantining when exposed to a COVID positive student depends on your cooperation and teamwork!

Thank you for your support and partnership!



Jim Sellinger
Chancellor of Catholic Schools



Dr. Donna Hargens
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