*****Massachusetts Department of***

***Elementary and Secondary Education***

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| Jeffrey C. Riley*Commissioner* |  |

# MEMORANDUM

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| **To:** | Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education |
| **From:**  | Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner |
| **Date:**  | February 8, 2022  |
| **Subject:** | Update on Action Steps to Support Schools, Students, and Families |

Since our meeting on January 25, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department or DESE) has continued to inform districts of new developments related to COVID-19 and to support schools and districts as they navigate teaching and learning during the pandemic.

The biggest development has been the rollout of the new COVID-19 testing option for K-12 schools. Under the new option, schools can sign up to receive at-home rapid antigen tests for weekly use by all participating staff and students, both vaccinated and unvaccinated. Schools exercising this option will discontinue contact tracing and Test and Stay. Test positivity rates in Test and Stay indicate that individuals identified as close contacts in school are very unlikely to contract or spread COVID-19. Therefore, extensive contact tracing and associated Test and Stay procedures are not adding significant value as a mitigation strategy despite the demand they place on the time of school health staff and school staff at large. The new option enables school health staff to focus more on identifying symptomatic individuals and other aspects of COVID-19 management. Schools must continue to participate in symptomatic and/or pooled testing in order to take part in the new at-home test program.

Approximately 537,000 staff and students from participating schools and districts have opted into the at-home testing program so far. Districts that applied by the priority deadline of January 21 received their first set of at-home staff tests during the week of January 24 and received their first set of at-home students tests last week.

The tests for this program are coming from the supply of [26 million at-home rapid](https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-secures-contract-for-26-million-rapid-antigen-tests) antigen tests that the Baker-Polito Administration ordered from iHealth and that will be delivered over the next three months.

On January 31, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Public Health adjusted the protocols for responding to COVID-19 scenarios to reflect the new at-home testing option and other updates.

The Department continues to hold webinars and release additional resources on [COVID-19 testing](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/testing/default.html) and other matters. As always, the DESE Rapid Respond COVID-19 Help Center remains open and available for consultation with districts and schools. Center staff have been working closely with districts to keep schools open and to keep students learning in person.

Attachments:

* [DESE/DPH Joint Memo on New COVID-19 Testing Program Option for K–12 Schools](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/2022-0118new-testing-program.pdf) — January 18, 2022
* [Press Release: Baker-Polito Administration Announces Weekly At-Home Tests Available for Students and Staff Enrolled in State's Testing Programs](https://mailchi.mp/doe.mass.edu/press-releasebaker-polito-administration-announces-weekly-at-home-tests-available-for-students-and-staff-enrolled-in-states-testing-programs?e=583fc2bc03) – January 18, 2022
* [DESE/DPH Protocols for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios — SY 2021-22](https://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/protocols/) — Updated January 31, 2022

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