

Saint Mary School COVID-19 Health Protocols¹

I. A New Approach to Sickness

The safe return of students to Saint Mary School requires (1) a strong culture of health and safety among students, faculty and staff; and (2) a commitment from all families to new protocols to protect our school community. It will not be one strategy that will prevent transmission of COVID-19 at Saint Mary School, but rather a combination of strategies taken together.

Parents/guardians will play a key role in keeping our school environment safe for all. All Saint Mary School families will need to adhere to new public health protocols guiding whether or not a child can be sent to school. Parents/guardians will be expected to monitor their child/children daily, *before arrival at school*, for symptoms suggestive of COVID-19. **If your child exhibits any of the following symptoms, he/she should stay home and be tested for COVID-19:**

- **Fever (100.0° F or higher), chills, or shaking chills;**
- **Cough (not due to other known cause, e.g. chronic cough);**
- **Difficulty breathing or shortness-of-breath;**
- **New loss of taste or smell;**
- **Sore throat;**
- **Headache *when in combination with other symptoms*;**
- **Muscle aches or body aches;**
- **Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea;**
- **Fatigue *when in combination with other symptoms*;**

¹ This document is a summary of guidance received from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and is presented for the benefit of the Saint Mary School parent community. To learn more about COVID-19 guidance issued by DESE, please see: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop.html>

- **Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) *when in combination with other symptoms.***

This is a new approach to sickness. Faculty and staff will also be expected to stay home and get tested when they experience any of the above symptoms that are suggestive of COVID-19.

Other important strategies that Saint Mary School will utilize include²:

- Masks that adequately cover both the nose and mouth for all students in grades 2 and above, as well as all faculty and staff. Students in preschool through grade 1 are *strongly encouraged* to wear masks while in the classroom, and will be required to wear a mask when physical distancing is not possible (when entering and leaving the building, traveling through a hallway, etc.).
- Hand-hygiene (hand-washing and hand-sanitizing) upon arrival at school, before eating, before dismissal, and at other opportune times;
- Physical distancing;
- Assignment of students to cohorts³;
- Assigned seating in the classrooms and at lunch.

II. COVID-19 School Protocols

Saint Mary School will be closely following the guidelines released by the Massachusetts DESE⁴ and DPH⁵ in the event of specific scenarios

² This is not a comprehensive list.

³ Massachusetts DESE (Department of Elementary & Secondary Education) recommends dividing students into cohorts, which are self-contained groups made up of students who are mainly in the same classes, on similar schedules, or ride the bus together. The cohort system is meant to limit interaction. If there is a positive COVID-19 case in the school, fewer individuals will have interacted with the person that tested positive. For cohorts to work, students should have assigned seats in class, on the bus and during meals. Saint Mary School has designated cohorts as follows: preschool is its own cohort; pre-K is its own cohort; Kindergarten and grade 1 are a cohort; grades 2 and 3 are a cohort; grades 4 and 5 are a cohort; and grades 6, 7 and 8 are a cohort.

⁴ Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

⁵ Department of Public Health.

related to COVID-19. It is important to note that the medical and scientific community is still learning about COVID-19. The public health response is evolving as the experts learn more about this disease. As a consequence, *these protocols will very likely be modified in the months ahead; they are not set in stone.*

Below is an overview of the protocols that all Massachusetts schools will be closely following. We have condensed the guidance from DESE into an easy-to-understand format for the benefit of our school community.

1. What will happen if a student (or staff member) has symptoms that are suspicious for COVID-19?

- If the student is at home at the onset of symptoms, he/she should stay at home and get tested. If a student is on the bus or at school, the school nurse will meet the child in the classroom or at the bus and escort the child to the medical waiting area⁶. A parent/guardian will need to immediately pick the child up and have the child tested.
- *If COVID-19 test results are negative*, the child can return to school once asymptomatic for a full 24 hours.
- *If the COVID-19 test results are positive*, see question # 2 below.
- *If the student/staff member decides not to test*, he/she should remain at home in self-isolation for 14 days from symptom onset.

2. What will happen if a student (or staff member) tests positive for COVID-19?

- If a child's COVID-19 test results are positive, the parent should:

⁶ The medical waiting area is an area separate from the nurse's office and designated for the evaluation and management of students with COVID-19-like symptoms.

- Keep the student at home (except to get medical care) and monitor symptoms;
 - Notify the school and assist the school in contact tracing efforts;
 - Notify close personal contacts;
 - Answer the call from the local board of health or the Massachusetts Community Tracing Collaborative;
 - If the symptoms are mild, the child should stay in self-isolation for at least 10 days and until 3 days have passed with no fever and improvement in symptoms.
- Families of students that are considered close contacts of the person with the positive test result will be informed that their child will need to quarantine for 14 days after the last known exposure to the person who tested positive, and will need to test. *For more details on close contacts please see the question #3 below.*
 - Saint Mary School will (1) promptly clean and disinfect the student or staff member's classroom and any other facilities visited by the individual and (2) will notify the bus company if the student travels by bus.

3. What is a close contact? What happens if a student (or staff member) is identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19?

- A close contact is defined as those who have been within 6 feet distance of the individual for at least 15 minutes while the person was infectious⁷. The infectious period begins 2 days

⁷ While early guidance from DESE stated that all students in an elementary classroom would be defined as close contacts, the most recent guidance from DESE provides a narrower definition of a close contact, mirroring DPH guidance. In the event of a student or staff member testing positive for COVID-19, Saint Mary School will work closely with the DPH to determine who is a close contact. Of note, in the coming year Saint Mary School will be following the DPH's guidance on assigned seating. Assigned seating is necessary for effective contact tracing.

- prior to symptom onset. If the person is asymptomatic, the infectious period is considered to be 2 days prior to the collection of the positive test.
- *Families of students that are considered close contacts of the person with the positive test result will be informed that their child will need to quarantine for 14 days after the last known exposure to the person who tested positive.* The child should also be tested. However regardless of the test result, the child should quarantine for 14 days. Of special note:
 - Ideally the test should be 4 or 5 days after the last exposure;
 - The family of the close contact should be especially careful to avoid higher-risk individuals (such as grandparents and those with underlying medical conditions);
 - The child's symptoms, if any, should be monitored;
 - If the family decides not to test the child, the child should remain at home in self-quarantine for 14 days.
 - If the school is informed of a positive test result in the middle of a school day, all of the above is applicable, and also:
 - Families of children who are close contacts will be quickly notified;
 - If the child is at school when he/she is identified as a close contact of an individual who tested positive for COVID-19, he/she should be masked for the remainder of the day (including students in preschool through grade 1) and adhere to strict physical distancing;
 - At the end of the day the child should go home and not take the bus home;
 - Caregivers may pick up their child prior to the end of the school day.

III. Conclusion

Saint Mary School is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all students, faculty and staff. By working together with our school families, we will get through this unique and challenging time. *The most important message to parents is to err on the side of caution and keep your child home if he/she feels unwell.*

Children with COVID-19 often present with mild symptoms that are indistinguishable from other common illnesses such as the flu or a bad cold.

The public health response to COVID-19 is evolving as the experts learn more about the disease; as a consequence, these protocols are likely to be modified in the months ahead.

Please direct any questions to School Nurse “Lisa” Elizabeth Powers at 508-842-1601 or elizabeth.powers@stmarysparish.org. Thank you!