



August 5, 2022

Superintendent's Message: Welcome Back and Protocol Updates

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff and Students,

Welcome back after a well-deserved summer break. I hope you had an opportunity to relax and enjoy summer with your family and friends. I don't have to remind you that we've experienced a relatively challenging two and a half years of education while living through a pandemic.

Although the 2020-21 school year was more challenging than the 2021-22 school year, the experience was still tough dealing with the pandemic at the same time. One thing that is clear is we have learned much about Covid-19 and how to mitigate exposure as well as the impacts Covid may have on a person.

As a result, The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH) have revised their safety protocols to allow for businesses and schools to function as normally as possible with recommendations on how to protect ourselves with vaccinations, wearing of masks, and regular testing mostly as recommendations and not requirements.

As we all look forward to our return to school on Aug. 18, 2022, we want to provide you with some key updates on several important health-related topics for the new school year that we are looking to implement.

Baseline testing before returning to school

We will be providing all staff and students with antigen test kits as recommended by CDPH and LACDPH prior to the start of school to best ensure everyone is Covid-free upon return. We would like all students and staff to help protect themselves while also caring about others. This is what a successful high-functioning, cooperative society looks like. We are requesting that an antigen test be taken prior to school confirming a negative result. A positive test requires at-home isolation and reporting to your school site. Your school site will provide instructions on picking up your antigen kit prior to the start of school.

Masks are voluntary, but strongly recommended

In alignment with CDPH and LACDPH we continue to strongly recommend mask-wearing indoors. Masks have been found to reduce spread of illness and work well as a self-protective measure against Covid-19 and other illnesses. We are reviewing LACDPH recommended protocols regarding masking when exposed to a positive case in classrooms and quarantining while still attending school if asymptomatic and will have follow up information in my next communication on this aspect of masking.

Testing for Covid-19 and survey

We are leaning toward voluntary weekly antigen testing conducted at home with any positive results reported to your school site, followed by the required isolation protocols. As you are aware, for the 2021-22 school year, we required weekly PCR tests, conducted on campus, or results brought in to school sites. This will be the honor system and we are trusting our families and staff to do the right thing for the benefit of the broader school community. We would like to see high participation with this program.

For the prospective at-home weekly antigen testing process, SMMUSD will provide antigen tests to families and staff, free of charge. Insurance information will not be collected or required.

We would like your input regarding testing. Please take this [testing survey](#) by Monday, Aug. 8, 2022 at 6 p.m.

Staff vaccinations

We continue to require staff to be vaccinated with the initial single or double dose of Covid-19 vaccines, and encourage boosters at the recommended intervals based on age and health status. Children six months and older are now eligible for the Covid-19 vaccine. The vaccines have shown to be highly effective in reducing severity of illness, hospitalization and death. Vaccine appointments are available through <https://myturn.ca.gov/> and many local locations. Doing this will also limit the amount of disruption with staffing due to potential exposure of staff to positive COVID cases in the community.

Facility readiness

Our facilities teams have worked all summer preparing classrooms, offices, and other indoor and outdoor spaces for the return of students and staff on Aug. 18. We utilize Best Management Practices (BMP) cleaning protocols to prepare all spaces with the highest health-protective measures to start the school year. Regular cleaning continues at all sites daily throughout the year.

Indoor Air Quality

Since our return to in-person instruction in spring of 2021, we have installed and maintained (Minimum Efficiency Reporting Values) MERV 13 filters in classrooms / spaces with air conditioning systems, and air scrubbers have been provided to indoor spaces without systems. MERV 13 air filters can filter out bacteria and viruses that can cause infections, including Covid-19. They are the highest rated filters that fit in standard units. Most homes have MERV 8 filters as the default.

Hand washing / sanitizing

We continue to encourage frequent hand washing or sanitizing to help prevent the spread of illness. We have additional hand washing stations set up on every campus, in addition to sinks and supplies in restrooms.

Stay home if sick

The greatest deterrent to the spread of illness is for students and staff to stay home when sick. Testing kits will be available at every school site for home testing to rule out Covid-19. Students or staff members who test positive may not attend school or come to work. We can prevent the

spread of illness when everyone does their part and stays home when sick. We will provide details on isolation protocols in a follow up message. We are not planning to have response testing hubs like last year and instead are moving to take home antigen kits for response testing purposes.

The California Department of Public Health has provided guidance for the return to school that aligns with our strategies of mitigating the spread of Covid-19, while recognizing the importance of in-person learning to student well-being and development. [Here are the most recent CDPH guidelines.](#)

I hope you enjoy the last two weeks of summer! We look forward to seeing students on Aug. 18!

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent