

## Public Schools of Brookline - Expert Advisory Panel #4 (Public Health, Safety, and Logistics)

### Updated Panel Recommendations on Face Coverings

Final - March 2022

Our panel is composed of Brookline parents with expertise in public health, medicine, occupational health, diagnostics, and operations who are assisting the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) with the difficult process of re-opening and operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below is a summary of our **updated** recommendations on face coverings in PSB buildings and other school-related contexts. For more technical information, other panel statements, and recordings of our meetings, please refer to the Panel 4 section of the [PSB Remote Learning Task Force website](#).

#### Advisory Panel 4 Members

**Dr. Sarita Chung**, Emergency Medicine Physician, Boston Children's Hospital; Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Emergency Medicine, Harvard Medical School

**Ms. Lan Dennie**, RN, BS, CMAC, Occupational Health Nurse, Fenway Health

**Dr. Benjamin Linas**, Infectious Diseases Physician, Boston Medical Center; Professor of Medicine and Epidemiology, Boston University.

**Dr. Nira Pollock**, Associate Medical Director, Infectious Diseases Diagnostic Laboratory, Boston Children's Hospital; Associate Professor of Pathology and Medicine, Harvard Medical School

**Mr. Boris L. Perlovsky**, Director, Innovation Strategy. Cambridge Innovation Center

**Dr. Serena Rajabiun**, Assistant Professor of Public Health, University of Massachusetts, Lowell

**Dr. Vishakha Sabharwal**, Pediatric Infectious Diseases Physician, Boston Medical Center, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Boston University.

**Dr. Lakshman Swamy**, Pulmonary/Critical Care physician and Medical Director at MassHealth Payment & Care Delivery Innovation; Assistant Professor, Population & Quantitative Health Sciences, UMass Chan Medical School

**Dr. Jenny Tam**, Lead Staff Scientist, Wyss Institute, Harvard University

**Mr. David Gacioch**, Partner, McDermott Will & Emery LLP (chair)

#### Background

In recent weeks, as the SARS-CoV-2 Omicron-driven case and hospitalization surge has abated, federal, state, and professional society guidance on COVID-19 mitigation has been updated to, among other things, significantly change the degree to which indoor face coverings should be required as a mitigation measure. Such updates include:

- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s [February 25 and March 4, 2022 community guidance update—endorsed](#) by the Infectious Diseases Society of America.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics' March 1, 2022 [guidance update](#).
- The Mass. Dep't of Public Health (DPH)'s March 1, 2022 [updated advisory](#).
- The Mass. Dep't of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)'s February 28, 2022 [revision to in-school mask requirements](#) and [updated COVID-19 response protocols](#).

## **Panel 4's Updated Recommendations**

Informed by those guidance updates, by PSB's [vaccination rates](#), and by current [statewide](#), [local](#), and [PSB](#) case and hospitalization metrics, we update our recommendations to the Superintendent and School Committee as follows:

- I. We strongly encourage all eligible PSB students, staff members, and their family members to **get fully vaccinated** against COVID-19 if they are not already, **including to obtain booster doses** whenever [eligible](#).
- II. There is **no ongoing need to maintain silent lunch/snack periods** in PSB schools as part of pandemic risk mitigation.
- III. **PSB should move to a mask-optional policy for grades pre-K-12** as soon as feasible once Brookline's Commissioner of Health and Human Services removes or modifies Town-wide mask requirements—understanding that implementation and communication of changes will not be instantaneous, and that students/staff/families may need reasonable time to plan and adjust. Whenever that change becomes effective:
  - A. PSB's **other existing anti-transmission measures should remain in place**, such as [enhanced ventilation](#), meeting outdoors when possible, and directing students and staff to stay home and get tested when they have qualifying symptoms.
  - B. It will be **very important for PSB to maintain mask-friendly buildings**, including socioemotional support of those students/staff/visitors who choose to continue masking and as much facilitation as possible of easy and no-cost access to high-filtration masks for all students/staff who wish to wear them—as we have recommended [here](#). **Students and staff should continue to have masks with them at school every day** in case a need arises to wear them, and PSB should continue to have stocks of masks available at schools for backup use as needed.
  - C. We **strongly recommend that PSB students/staff continue to wear well-fitting masks in the following situations** (and PSB should consider continuing to require indoor mask wearing for those in situations 1-5—although we understand that enforcement may be challenging and compliance will not be perfect):
    1. Those who are present in school with any **symptoms of respiratory illness** (not attributable to seasonal allergies or other diagnosed, non-infectious cause)—**but only after they have been cleared to come to school per existing PSB COVID-19 symptom and testing recommendations**;
    2. Those with **household close contacts** who recently tested positive for COVID-19;
    3. Those who are indicated to wear masks as part of [CDC/DPH/DESE isolation/quarantine protocols](#), especially those just returning from isolation for COVID-19 and those unvaccinated individuals who have been close contacts

of COVID-19-positive individuals (both through day 10 after onset/exposure, as specified in the linked protocols);

4. All **audience members or spectators** at large concerts/assemblies/sporting or other events—especially if gymnasium/auditorium occupancy limits for [enhanced ventilation](#) ( $\geq 32$  CFM clean air per occupant) cannot be observed;
5. Those who are **not yet fully vaccinated** against COVID-19, including those not currently eligible for COVID-19 vaccination (e.g., those ages 2-4);
6. Those who are **immunocompromised** and may not have a protective immune response to the COVID-19 vaccine, or who are **otherwise at high risk** for severe COVID-19 illness if infected; and
7. Those with **household members in categories 5. or 6.**

Future changes in COVID-19 metrics, the emergence of new variants of concern, or the availability of new evidence on transmission pathways and risk may necessitate revisions to the recommendations above. **The pandemic is not over and we, as a community, must remain vigilant and flexible to adapt to developments as they arise.**

Additional reference: Newton Public Schools' Medical Advisory Group's February 15, 2022 [updated recommendations](#) on in-school masking.