

The SDE and DPH held a meeting this morning (9/15/23) on health and safety updates, more specifically to review current recommendations for schools regarding COVID-19 and the upcoming fall respiratory virus season. The target audience was Superintendents, with appropriate staff, and local health directors.

- Panel included:
 - Charlene Russell-Tucker SDE Commissioner
 - Lisa Morrissey DPH
 - Jody Terranova DPH
 - Mike McKeon – SDE Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs
 - Chlo-Anne Bobrowski
 - John Khalil
 - Dr. Lynn Sosa
 - Manisha Juthani – DPH Commissioner
 - Kristen Soto lead epidemiologist
- Manisha Juthani
 - We're in very different place now.
 - Several weeks into school year and Covid rates are rising. About 3x hospital admissions now than July when we were at an all time low.
 - Going into fall season, we have 3 respiratory viruses: Covid, flu, and RSV for which we have vaccine. And there are other respiratory viruses. Cover mouth, stay home when sick, practice good hand hygiene.
 - Just this week CDC recommended Covid shots most likely annually for those 6 months and older.
 - For educators on the call, recommend doing that sooner than later because there is a lot of Covid in the community.
 - Low rates of flu and RSV but we are starting to see a rise in RSV in southern states so we can expect that in the next several weeks.
 - RSV vaccination is recommended that you discuss with your provider to determine if right for you.
 - In terms of flu, this vaccine is also recommended. Many sites will have mass vaccination like universities.
 - You can get all these vaccines together. Would probably suggest get Covid vaccine now.
 - If able to stagger, can get flu in a couple of weeks.
 - Get RSV separately from other two probably does make sense.
 - If child has fever, stay home.
 - Fever free for 24 hours can go back to school.
 - There are no tests being deployed by the state through mass distribution.
 - We want to keep kids in school but if sick stay home.
 - If symptom free, coming back to school is appropriate.
 - Have to balance all of the children's public health considerations – maintaining balance between infectious disease mitigation and keeping students in school
- Dr. Lynn Sosa
 - Reviewed slides

- Data focused on hospitalizations – the RESP-Net hospitalizations focused in New Haven and Middlesex County. This shows peaks for last year. Started seeing RSV early in season last year and peaked end of October beginning of November.
- Flu peaked beginning of December and Covid beginning of January.
- ER visits for respiratory visits. Similar to hospitalizations it shows where we were last year with 3 viruses and over the summer. We had low levels over summer but over last 6 weeks increase in Covid-19
- Vaccines: seasonal flu vaccines currently available and recommended 6 months and older
- Covid vaccine available this weekend and recommended 6 months and older
- RSV vaccine recommendations based on age, etc.
- No mass distribution of covid home tests, but available on commercial market.
- Antiviral treatments available for flu and Covid
- Schools districts recommended to develop policy to operationalize CDC policies
- Outbreaks – portal has been decommissioned and schools aren't required to report
- Outbreaks should be reported as category 1 conditions. What constitutes an outbreak – in general 3 cases in classroom or 10% in group, e.g. freshman class. If ever a question if have outbreak, call local health department.
- Isolation for viral respiratory diseases
 - people who are sick need to stay home.
 - CDC recommendations for covid-19
 - exposed persons who are well can attend school and work.
 - CDC recommends isolation for 5 days followed by masking for 5 days if individual is fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medications and other symptoms have started to improve
 - Other viral respiratory diseases: individual is fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication and feeling well enough to be in school
- No special cleaning and disinfection needed
- Ventilation – continue to recommend schools follow recommendations of ASHRAE - American Society of , and make sure systems are maintained and monitored
- 5 main strategies
 - Get vaccinated for flu, covid-19, and RSV (infants, pregnant, over 60)
 - Stay home when sick with fever or respiratory symptoms
 - Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette to prevent spread
 - Consider wearing a mask when sick/coughing from any illness to prevent spread
 - Seek care and/or testing if you are not improving or if are someone who may benefit from antiviral treatment for flu or covid-19
-
- Questions
 - What is recommendation for students who test positive for Covid and return to sports

- Similar to last year based on severity of disease. Will be posted. Will send link with guidelines. They haven't been updated since last school year.
- We had put out an FAQ with the questions we get the most so we will provide that with some updates.
- Is there any indication that isolation will change to symptom based to time based
 - Right now, no.
- Can you confirm point of contact at SPH for covid outbreaks and clusters
 - Can add to guidance. It's basically calling main number. First place to call is local health department.
- Since CDC recommends masking, do schools need to notify parents of potential exposure when staff tested positive for Covid
 - That's up to schools and how they operationalize CDC recommendations
- Covid testing seems to be advised for those at risk and potentially needing antiviral treatment
 - There are lots of respiratory diseases circulating. We are not distributing tests or mandating tests. If child who has mild symptoms recovers, they are able to come back to school.
- Some recommend that students shouldn't get flu vaccine before Halloween and to get it between Halloween and Thanksgiving?
 - There's no timeline for how long vaccines last. Main thing is to get as many people vaccinated. October is generally time we recommend for flu vaccine. We recommend for Covid now because already circulating.
 - Roughly 4 months is probably where maximum immunity lasts.
 - Recommend Covid vaccines now because rates are going up.
 - Flu before Boo. Get vaccinated before end of October.
 - Getting both vaccines on same day is fine.
- Can a student or staff return to school if symptoms have improved at the end of 5 days, but they still test positive?
 - Yes, they can.
- Is it appropriate for school nurse to recommend that parent administer self-test.
 - If people want to be tested, they should. But don't have to be tested.
 - If school nurse starts seeing dip in classroom with a lot of respiratory virus – 10% of class is going down. Engage with local health department and maybe DPH for guidance on improving mitigation and maybe there is more of a role in testing.
 - If Covid test is negative and child is sick, still stay home. That is part of why it's not required. If have fever or bad cough, stay home. Compared to prior years, where Covid was the primary virus, now we have other viruses.
- If a student is out quarantining for 5 days and parents don't want to mask, but they rapid test and it's negative, is that safe to do – return without masking?
 - This is something to address in policies re: what's required based on CDC recommendations.
- The Covid tests expiration dates were extended. What is current time after expiration you can still use it.

- Depends on lot number and you can look those up. We can provide that link again.
- Is there a recommendation for how long after someone tested positive you should wait to get the vaccine.
 - Understand that CDC is recommending to wait at least 1 month. Thereafter, it's a choice re: how long to wait.
- Several parents insist on being able to do nebulizer treatments in school setting.
 - Would not encourage use of nebulizer treatment in school. Using a spacer and inhaler is recommended instead.
- Medical director at boarding school – we have been having roommate of student who tested positive for Covid mask for 10 days because household contact. Is that still necessary?
 - It's how you operationalize the CDC recommendations in your own policy.
- Had over 500 individuals on this call. It's so important that we were able to get together to hear from DPH colleagues. Working toward health and safety of school community.
- If things are changing and we need to get back together, we will.