



Our Lady Star of the Sea School  
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## COVID SYMPTOMS REMINDER

Dear OLSS Families,

This is a friendly reminder that COVID symptom screening should be occurring DAILY, in the morning prior to leaving for school. We have recently seen an influx of students arriving to school with symptoms. Parents should check their student's temperature, and then assess students for the following Tiers of symptoms:

**TIER 1: ANY ONE of the following: new onset cough, shortness of breath, fever over 100, or loss of taste or smell.**

**\*IF your student has ANY ONE OF THE ABOVE SYMPTOMS, they SHOULD NOT enter the school building.**

**TIER 2: ANY TWO of the following: Headache, runny nose/congestion, body aches, chills, diarrhea, nausea/vomiting, sore throat.**

**\*IF your student has ANY TWO OF THE ABOVE SYMPTOMS, they SHOULD NOT enter the school building.**

**The above symptoms REQUIRE COVID testing prior to return to school.** We have been seeing an influx of students attending school "symptomatic" and requiring to be sent home, especially on Mondays after the weekend. We understand students may develop symptoms AFTER arriving to school and that this can be unavoidable at times, however we are often receiving student reports that they have had symptoms all weekend and are then returning to school without testing. IF students develop symptoms or have an exposure (vaccinated or not) on weekends or "no school days", date of symptom onset and list of symptoms or exposure date are still required to be reported to [schoolnurse@olss.org](mailto:schoolnurse@olss.org) for further assessment. This is extremely important in contact tracing if a student develops symptoms and is positive. If symptom onset date or exposure date is not accurately reported, it could cause close contacts to be missed and further spread of the virus. While the symptoms above could be due to many other illnesses and viruses, we cannot rule out that the symptoms are NOT COVID without a proper COVID test completed.

**Students attending school with symptoms and without proper testing, run the risk of closing down a classroom** if a student is determined positive and another student contracts COVID from them. An "outbreak" per the Health Department is any 2 students testing positive that can be deemed related. For example, one student tests positive and then a close contact of that student tests positive. The health department runs the right to shut down the classroom if they deem the classroom a risk to more exposures and positive cases related to age, ability to follow protocol, and other factors. This could potentially shut down an entire class for 10-14 days.

IF your student presents in the morning with symptoms that are atypical/new for them, PLEASE remain home, monitor for the day, reach out if in doubt, and I can assist in further assessment and determine if testing is needed or not, or if we just need to monitor for the day to see if further symptoms develop. We do understand that missing school and work is an inconvenience for us all. We also understand that testing is not always convenient on weekends and days off. IF you cannot find access to testing on a weekend or day off, but your student requires testing, please contact me so we can schedule testing asap. I can arrange for drive thru testing on the next school day or arrange for testing in Prince Frederick at the health department testing site.

## **PROPER COVID TESTING**

Proper COVID testing is 1 PCR test or 2 rapid tests 48 hours apart. Please note that home testing kits are NOT an acceptable form of testing at this time. At NO TIME will we accept a negative home COVID test as an acceptable form of testing for return to school. The ONLY time a home test will be accepted is in the case of a rapid POSITIVE test. In this situation, if a student tests positive via rapid testing, we will accept these results to ensure prompt isolation. The parent will isolate the student at home and may follow up with PCR test if they feel the test may not be accurate. Currently all students have access to rapid and PCR testing at OLSS with parent consent. Students can also access easy drive-through testing at the health department site in Prince Frederick for Calvert County residents and at Hollywood Fire Department for St. Mary's students. Additionally, urgent cares and local minute clinics also have testing options available.

## **COVID Vs ALLERGIES**

Is it COVID or is it allergies? This is a popular question and struggle since COVID began. With the changes in seasons, those with allergies can frequently struggle with a runny nose/congestion, itchy watery eyes, sneezing, headache, and an irritated sore throat. When assessing your student for allergies versus concerns for COVID, remember that some of the symptoms can overlap. If there is any question that your student's symptoms seem to be more than their typical allergy symptoms, it is always best to err on the side of caution and keep them home for observation to better determine their health situation. If their symptoms are not relieved by their regular allergy regimen or your student is presenting atypical from their usual symptoms, it is always best to test! In the past two years, my personal nursing experience with COVID has been few cases present with fever. Many cases have presented with symptoms described as "sinus pressure", "sinus headache", "I was congested and thought it was my allergies." This is why it is crucial that if symptoms are out of the ordinary, to report and complete proper testing.

Allergies can present with sneezing and watery eyes, these are NOT COVID symptoms. However, allergies and COVID both can present with congestion/runny nose, headache and or sore throat. This is what we call the "gray area" where it could be either issue. Symptoms of fatigue, shortness of breath, muscle aches, chills, or fever should be evaluated with the completion of a COVID PCR test. If your student experiences symptoms in the "gray area" please keep them home, observe, and if no improvement with their allergy medicine, have them follow up with their provider for further evaluation.

Most providers will want to complete a COVID test to ensure the symptoms are not COVID, and then will provide an allergy note for students who are suffering from seasonal allergies. A seasonal allergy note with a list of typical symptoms a student experiences at baseline will assist in preventing repeated testing. It is important that if your student is diagnosed with allergies, to provide a note to the school nurse office AND to be sure you keep your student on their daily allergy medicine regimen recommended by their provider EVERY DAY throughout the change in seasons to ensure their symptoms are controlled. IF a provider COVID tests a student, we MUST have their negative PCR results before they can return to school. If symptoms develop that are not the student's typical allergy symptoms or if new onset symptom/symptoms occur, a student with diagnosed allergies may still be subject to testing based on the severity of symptoms and change from baseline.

## **MASKING AND DISTANCING**

Please remind all students about proper masking and distancing protocols in school. Students must wear a securely fitting clean mask to school daily. The mask **MUST** cover both the nose and mouth securely. Students **MUST** wear their masks covering both the nose and the mouth while in the school building. Students will remain 3 feet or more while sitting at desks and **MUST** remain 6 feet or more apart when eating or not wearing their mask. Not following these protocols places students at risk for being identified as close contacts if a positive case arises and requires a 10-day quarantine. **BOTH** the student who is identified as positive **AND** the other students around them **MUST** wear their masks properly to avoid a “close contact” situation where quarantine must occur. We have seen proof here at school that when students are masked and distanced properly, that no spread of the virus has occurred. **IF** students are at an age/mental capacity to know and understand the concept of proper mask wearing and they still do not wear their mask properly or are pulling their mask below their nose/mouth, they will be subject to immediate dismissal from school and sent home.

## **HOLIDAY TRAVEL**

At this time there are no mandates or restrictions on travel within the US. We ask all families that will be traveling over the holidays to please maintain precautions and proper masking during travel to protect our OLSS community upon return. International travel mandates require negative testing upon boarding to return to the US. We also request to refrain from visiting family if they are presenting with “COVID-like symptoms” unless they have tested negative for COVID. During the holidays, families are still required to report COVID-like symptoms (symptom list above) to [schoolnurse@olsss.org](mailto:schoolnurse@olsss.org). **IF** your student meets criteria for testing, they must have proof of negative test prior to return to school. Failure to follow this requirement may result in disciplinary action or removal from school. We plan to return to in school learning following the holiday and are not implementing a “virtual week” as we did last year. However, if we find that students are returning to school without proper testing and illness, this will be subject to change for future holidays.

These times are very trying for all as we all try to navigate this new way of life when our student or family member gets ill. A cold can never just be “a cold” or allergies “just allergies” anymore. When a family member in a household gets sick, its days out of work or school awaiting results and exposures could mean 10 days out of school/work. If a family member becomes positive, it means isolating away from them for over a week to try to avoid even longer quarantine periods for the rest of the family. I too have had to miss work and my students miss school due to the pandemic.

I want to thank all of you for all that you have done to keep our students in the school building the last 2 years. It takes a community of people working together as a team to prevent outbreaks within the school and to protect the vulnerable. While symptoms may be mild for many, for others COVID can be life-threatening. Please continue to push forward and work together to protect our OLSS family.

Sincerely,

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