

Dear Maryland State Board of Education members,

The MCCPTA recommends not lifting the mask mandate any earlier than February 28, 2022. We urge the State Board of Education to evaluate maintaining the mandate beyond that date based on circumstances assessed closer to that time. Considerations that should be taken into account include 1) COVID-19 case rates and 2) pediatric vaccination rate and availability.

The science is clear that COVID-19 is airborne and indoor transmission is best mitigated with a multi-layered approach that includes masks, spacing, high vaccination, regular testing and proper ventilation and filtration.¹ Masks are one of two mechanisms that can reduce short range transmission. Further, in light of the new [Omicron variant](#) and [“Due to the circulating and highly contagious Delta variant, CDC recommends universal indoor masking by all students \(age 2 and older\), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.”](#)^{2 3 4}

COVID-19 variants have produced periods of unpredictable surges in viral activity, hospitalizations and death after notable declines. Recent increases in global settings where vaccination coverage has been high (e.g. > 75%) such as the U.K, Germany, and Denmark, but where COVID mitigation measures have been reduced, have seen COVID-19 cases rise to near pandemic peaks, including among adolescents and younger children.⁵ Until the entire population has access to a vaccine, including all children younger than 5 years old, COVID-19 poses a risk to our health and our economy, especially as winter approaches.

As we enter the holiday travel season and more inclement weather, it is critical to continue protecting our youngest populations as well as school staff — especially pediatric, medically vulnerable populations (e.g. those who are immunocompromised or with [underlying higher risk health conditions](#) such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, etc.).⁶ Past COVID-19 transmission trends have demonstrated that during holidays there are upticks in cases.

Now that the Pfizer SARS-CoV-2 vaccine has received emergency use authorization for children ages 5-11, we anticipate that many parents will protect their children through vaccination. However, as with adults, it will take children a minimum of 5 weeks to be fully vaccinated once all eligible children have access to vaccination services. In addition, some parents may choose not to vaccinate their children until the vaccine is fully licensed by FDA sometime in 2022.

In continuing to apply a layered mitigation approach that includes mask requirements for all schools in Maryland, we can reduce risk of school and community transmission, and offer further protection for our younger unvaccinated children, including siblings under the age of 5. Continued masking will also protect those in higher risk occupational settings including teachers and school staff from breakthrough cases. In protecting the most vulnerable among us, we are protecting all and reducing the need for quarantine and school closures.

Please consider our concerns and keep the mask mandate in all schools in Maryland until our children under 12 are able to be vaccinated.

Sincerely,

MCCPTA

¹ CDC. How COVID-19 Spreads. Updated July 14, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>.

² CDC. CDC Statement on B.1.1.529 (Omicron variant). Updated Friday, November 26, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s1126-B11-529-omicron.html>.

³ CDC. How COVID-19 Spreads. Updated July 14, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>.

⁴ CDC. Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools. Updated November 5, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>.

⁵ CDC. COVID Data Tracker. Updated October 25, 2021. Retrieved from <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#global-trends>.

⁶ CDC. COVID-19 People With Certain Medical Conditions. Updated October 14, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>.