



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Town of Westwood
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
BOARD OF HEALTH



Jared Orsini, R.E.H.S./R.S. Health Director
Jason Belmonte, Food Inspector/Sanitarian
Lorraine Donovan, Administrative Assistant
Margaret Sullivan, R.N., B.S.N., Public Health Nurse

Shelley Reeve, R.N., B.S.N., J.D.
Carol Ahearn, R.N., B.S.N.
Roger L. Christian, M.D., Chairperson

October 13, 2021

RE: DESE Waiver for Face Covering Exemption

Dear Westwood School Committee and Superintendent Parks,

The Board of Health has been asked to consider whether or not it would be in favor of the School Committee applying for an exemption of DESE's face covering requirement for vaccinated individuals at Westwood High School.

In assessing the overall COVID-19 picture at Westwood High School, the following metrics that have been provided to us have been considered. Approximately 82% of students and 94% of staff have been fully vaccinated for COVID-19 at the time of this writing. 51% of Westwood High School students are participating in pool testing. The CDC currently identifies the COVID-19 transmission risk in Norfolk County as "substantial", and a such recommends that all individuals wear a face covering when indoors in public regardless of their vaccination status.

Since the start of the school year, Westwood has recorded 70 confirmed new cases of COVID-19. Of those 70 cases, 6 cases were in the age 14-18 group.

The numbers above include the most current public health COVID-19 data which shows 21 new cases in the past 14-day reporting period and a percent positivity of 1.40%. 2 of these 21 new cases are from the age 14-18 group.

Both case counts and positive test rate have been flat or in decline since the August delta spike.

Our COVID-19 infection numbers are trending in the right direction as we have now experienced a month and a half of school. Infection rates have flattened which indicates it is a reasonable time to apply for an exemption of the COVID-19 face mask mandate. The Board of Health feels that this exemption should not be implemented until such time as our CDC county level metric moves to "moderate" or "low". A designation of "moderate or

“low” affirms that vaccinated individuals are no longer advised to wear face coverings in indoor public places.

If the decision is made to have vaccinated students return to school mask free, we must consider the eventuality that COVID-19 cases may increase and mitigation measures may necessitate a re-institution of the mask mandate. The Board of Health would recommend the CDC county level transmission designation of “substantial” or “high” be used to signal the need to re-institute masking. This designation along with town 14-day case count, percent positivity and cases per 100K can serve as primary data points to determine if community transmission is occurring and if it is necessary to return to masks.

Lastly, the Board of Health recommends additional efforts to increase pool testing among WHS students. A 51 % participation rate may not be high enough to accurately identify COVID-19 cases among this age group, especially for those who are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic. The most important data point we could ask for to determine what is happening in a given population is direct assessment. Encouraging families to self-report the results of “at home” COVID-19 tests when it is possible to do so, as well as encouraging those who have not signed up for pool testing to participate would hopefully increase our numbers and give us more accurate real time data.

The Board of Health looks forward to continuing this discussion as hopefully, we continue to see COVID-19 cases decline.

Sincerely,

Jared Orsini REHS/RS
Health Director
Westwood Board of Health