



Health Team Communication and Newsletter Items Winter 2022

February 25, 2022

Dear Families,

We are writing to tell you about our plans for navigating this next stage of the pandemic. Positive cases in our school community have declined sharply since January and those in Guilford County continue to fall; in the last 7 days, cases have decreased 24%, and the COVID test positivity rate has fallen to 7.7%. As you know, the Guilford County mask mandate was rescinded last week and Guilford County schools, along with most of our peer independent schools, have gone mask optional, effective immediately. While Governor Cooper encouraged schools to go mask optional by March 7th, the NC Strong Schools Toolkit (which has guided many of our safety measures over the past 2 years) has not yet been modified to support going mask optional. However, on Wednesday, we were advised by the Guilford County Health Department that on or before March 7th, the NC Strong Schools Toolkit will be revised to add that recommendation.

With this information and our declining case and test positivity rates, NGFS will go mask optional for staff and students after spring break, starting on Monday, March 14th.

If the Toolkit guidance is not revised as expected, or our school community numbers start to rise, we will postpone our shift to mask optional. In this case, you will be notified before we return from spring break.

How was this decision made? We follow the guidance of the NCDHHS Strong Schools Toolkit and the Guilford County Health Department. The Health team, in collaboration with local, state, and national health experts, continuously evaluates the state of our community and considers the implications of any changes to our risk mitigation measures.

Major points of consideration included:

- Rapidly declining case and test positivity rates
- When the pandemic began, vaccines were not available and now they are. The vast majority of our community has had the opportunity to be vaccinated.
- Our school vaccination rate is high (98% of staff and 85% of age-eligible students have received at least 2 doses of the vaccine). The majority of those eligible for a booster have received it.
- When the pandemic began, the virus often resulted in serious disease and hospitalization. The Omicron variant, while highly contagious, generally causes less severe disease than infection with prior variants, especially for the vaccinated and boosted.
- Hospitalization rates have fallen in recent weeks.

- If you have been following our [COVID dashboard](#), you saw that our COVID cases peaked at the end of January; we have had only 2 new positive cases in February. This trend matches what we are seeing in the larger community.
- While most local schools rapidly moved to mask optional, our timeline (waiting until after Spring break) and our deliberate process for evaluating and updating our policies is consistent with the slow and steady approach we have taken all along. We adjust the dimmer switches of our layered risk mitigation strategies when it makes sense to do so.

As always, we will remain responsive to this ever-evolving situation. We agree with Dr. Ingrid Katz, an associate faculty director at the Harvard Global Health Institute, who noted that mask mandates should be allowed to come and go as cases rise and fall. If the situation changes, we may recommend or require that all community members re-mask.

"We have to be prepared to pivot," Katz said, adding, "If we get another variant coming at us in a couple of months that is really infectious, then people have to be willing to re-mask."

The last two years have tried our patience and our resolve on almost every level. We understand that every member of our community has different needs and that each person and family may respond differently to these changing conditions. During this time of transition, we ask that each of us be mindful that some families, students, and staff have experienced considerable challenge and loss during the pandemic, and many will want or need to continue with more precaution due to their unique health conditions or circumstances.

Our priority is to protect our community as much as possible while returning to a more "normal" school life as conditions allow. We know that mental health of both children and adults has suffered tremendously through the last two years and we look forward to enjoying the return of beloved traditions and school activities.

For now, we will continue with our daily health screenings, require PCR tests for those presenting with COVID symptoms, and keep those who are unwell and household contacts of positive cases who are under high school age away from school. We will still eat outdoors and be outside whenever it is practical, and we will continue to practice social distancing, handwashing, and cleaning surfaces regularly.

We know that you may be wondering what will happen if there is a case in a mask optional environment. If there is a case in a classroom where not everyone is masked, you will be notified so that people can receive appropriate guidance, testing, and other resources. For our staff and for students 5 and over, we will continue to offer PCR testing 5 days after exposure. Exposed individuals must wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days after the last known exposure.

We understand that each family may respond differently to this change. Our faculty and staff will work with students to ensure that all students know that masking will be a family or personal choice and that comments, questions, or speculations about why another person is or is not wearing a mask are not appropriate.

We look forward to a more "normal" school experience for students, staff, and families this spring.

Thank you,
Kim, Pattie, and Ivy
NGFS Health team

Friday, January 28, 2022

Community Newsletter Vol. 20

Health Team Communication

As announced in the health update email sent on January 17, since our return from Winter Break, the health team has been inundated with student and staff health situations and have been unable to take the time to publish an updated COVID handbook.

The Health Team communicates news and updates regarding health policies and COVID-19 protocols through emails and newsletter announcements; these serve as direction until an updated COVID handbook can be published. You can see the current communication, in order of most recent [here](#). This link is also found on the [NGFS COVID-19 webpage](#).

January 17, 2022

Dear NGFS families,

Last week, in order to limit the transmission of COVID-19 during this surge, our medical advisors recommended an update to quarantine requirements for children under high school age who have a COVID positive household member. As we have said before, CDC and state guidelines change frequently and these serve as the minimum requirements; they do not dictate the policies and protocols of New Garden Friends School.

Household exposures are deemed the “most risky.” For the next few weeks, we will employ the following quarantine requirements for children in A Child’s Garden through Grade 8. Each case is unique and there may be situations in which high school students are required to quarantine the full five days after exposure. A variety of factors are considered when determining the return to school plan.

When the student has a household member who has tested positive for COVID-19:

- The student must stay home and away from all who live outside the household for at least 5 days after their last contact with the person who has COVID-19. The date of the last contact is considered Day 0.
- If the student does not develop symptoms, we will arrange a PCR test on Day 5 and the student can return to school on Day 6, while waiting for the test result. The student must wear a well-fitting mask at all times at school.
- Monitor your students for 10 days after their last contact with the COVID-19 positive person. Watch for fever, sore throat, cough, shortness of breath, or other COVID-19 symptoms.
- If your student develops symptoms, contact health@ngs.org to arrange for a PCR test as soon as possible. The student should isolate in the home to the extent possible until test results are received.

It is our hope that we will not have to employ these new requirements for very long.

Unfortunately the health team has been inundated with student and staff health situations and we have been unable to take the time to publish an updated COVID handbook. The health emails you have received since Winter Break and the newsletter updates should serve as direction until an updated COVID handbook can be published.

Thank you,

Kim and the Health Team

Friday, January 14, 2022

Community Newsletter Vol. 18

Dear NGFS Community,

The last two weeks have been challenging and it has been heartening to see the efforts everyone is making to stay healthy.

Our medical advisors have communicated that when a household member has the Omicron variant of COVID-19, in 80-90% of these households, it spreads to other household members. We are grateful that families are reporting all household cases as that helps us make the best plans for students. We know that some are frustrated with the time testing is taking and understand how stressful it can be when family members are sick. Throughout the state, labs are processing more tests than ever before. We are getting test results to you as quickly as we can. In terms of guidance and next steps, we are following the guidelines we have been given by medical professionals; it is often extremely challenging, but it is necessary for us to treat every cold symptom as a potential case of COVID-19.

With the extreme transmissibility of the Omicron variant, we have been advised that contact tracing at this stage of the surge is of limited value. We will keep families advised of cases through our [dashboard](#) and will discontinue the practice of communicating every case of COVID to a specific grade or campus group. *Please be assured, however, that if your student is a direct, close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19, you will be notified.*

Since our return from Winter Break, our teachers and staff have been tasked with not only their usual duties but often with the duties of other staff members who are out sick or at home caring for sick loved ones. In addition, our health team has been working long hours on evenings and weekends to serve our community during this surge. While health experts have expressed cautious optimism that we may soon be approaching the peak of the Omicron surge, we understand that the rollercoaster of rising and falling COVID cases may continue in the weeks ahead. We appreciate your patience and cooperation as our community makes its way through this difficult time.

Thank you,

Kim and the Health Team

Please remember that the Health team is available Monday through Friday from 7 am-5 pm. The best way to reach the health team is to email health@ngfs.org. We are aware that there are tests outstanding, and we will get results to you as soon as possible.

January 7, 2022

Dear NGFS Community,

We know that we have shared a great deal of information this week and that it may be overwhelming for some. Please know that we try to find a balance in our communication and we understand that we may miss the mark occasionally. If we have done that this week, I apologize.

When the CDC guidelines for quarantining changed, we, like many schools, looked to their medical professionals for further clarification. After meeting with local professionals as well as a national group of pediatricians, we learned further information about how the Omnicron variant often presents (sore throat, headache, dizziness), how it sometimes follows a typical rhinovirus or cold, and how community exposure differs greatly from household exposure.

Each situation is different and we make every attempt to listen carefully and get you the information you need to both safeguard our community and get students and staff back to school as quickly as possible.

[On Tuesday, the CDC added the use of antigen testing as an additional step at the end of the 5-day quarantine protocols they announced last week.](#) Here's how this will look at school:

When an individual has tested positive for COVID-19 through a PCR test or a Rapid Antigen test and has symptoms:

- Isolation is required for at least 5 days. To calculate the 5-day isolation period, day 0 is the first day of symptoms. Day 1 is the first full day after symptoms develop. Isolation can end after 5 full days if one is symptom-free and fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- *If a COVID-positive individual is unable to properly and consistently wear a mask when around others, isolation must continue for a full 10 days.*

In order to come back to school we are implementing a “Screen to Return” protocol on Day 6 for those who have been symptom-free for 24 hours:

- Contact health@ngfs.org on Day 5 or when one has been symptom-free for 24 hours*. We will arrange for a rapid antigen test on the morning of Day 6 or the day following the cessation of symptoms. The rapid test will be done in the car before the student or staff member enters school. If that individual has a positive test result, then they must return home for 5 more days (a total of 10 days). If they are negative, the individual may enter school.
- The individual should not go to places where one is unable to wear a mask, such as restaurants.
- Please note: After returning to school, students must adhere to a strict mask-wearing policy for 5 days. This may include eating in a different place than usual when snack/lunch is indoors.

*We will only test on school days. If you need to arrange a test for a Monday, please email health@ngfs.org on Monday morning by 8:30 a.m. and we will set it up.

Thank you for your patience and your commitment to keeping our community healthy,

Kim and the Health Team

HEALTH UPDATES

This afternoon the Health team sent an email with Health Updates to school families and staff. You can also read that email [here](#).

Vaccine Cards

In order to give families proper guidance, it is essential that we have copies of the most up-to-date vaccination information for your student. Please send in up to date vaccination cards to health@ngfs.org.

Resource Reminders

[Responding to COVID-19 NGFS webpage](#) - includes our COVID-19 Dashboard and Handbook and information and links for the required Daily Health Screening. Also, at the bottom of that webpage, you will find links to resources for evaluation masks for children.

CDC: [Quarantine and Isolation](#) (updated Jan. 4, 2022)

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

Dear NGFS families,

As we all wrestle with the effects of the new COVID-19 variant, the NGFS Health Team continues to seek guidance from medical professionals. In the last two days, we have received repeated recommendations to have all students in N95, KN95, or KF94 masks.

The CDC recommends that all students, teachers, staff, and visitors wear face masks in K-12 schools regardless of vaccination status but they have not updated their recommendations regarding specific types of masks. Many physicians have:

According to Dr. Purvi Parikh, an immunologist with NYU Langone Health, everyone (children included) should level up from reusable fabric masks to medical-grade masks and even consider double-masking.

“Do not take this variant (Omicron) lightly. It spreads much more easily, replicating 70 times faster than the Delta variant in people’s airways, even among vaccinated people. Children should be wearing medical-grade masks and double-masking if they can tolerate it, especially if they are unvaccinated,” she says.

We are asking our families to seriously consider the switch to more protective masks for your students. We understand that this may not be feasible or desirable for all parents and students, but we think it makes sense to share what we have been told.

Linsey Marr, an environmental engineer at Virginia Tech who tests face masks in her lab advises parents to consider the attributes of masks in this order of priority:

1. *Comfort: "If your kid won't wear it, it's not helping at all," she said.*
2. *Fit: "Leaks around the sides are like having a hole in your mask and aerosols carrying the virus can get right through," Marr said.*
3. *Filtration: How well the mask blocks small particles*

One of our pediatricians explained her priority for masks for children, adolescents, and teens:

- *KN95/KF94 are the best. If you can require use of those, that would be great!*
- *Next best is a surgical mask (even better if a surgical mask that has a bendable nose piece) with a cloth mask over it. The cloth over it allows the surgical mask to be pressed to the face, creating a bit better fit and closing the side gaps that the surgical masks create.*
- *Next best is a surgical mask alone, best if the surgical mask has the bendable nose piece.*
- *Next best is a surgical mask without a bendable nose piece.*
- *Not recommended is a cloth mask. No longer a good option, but if that is all one has, then it's better than nothing.*
- *Not recommended is a non mask face covering like a bandana or such. Not much benefit.*
- *Not recommended is wearing a mask or face covering that slips down or is not worn appropriately.*
- *Worst of all is no mask or covering at all.*

Here are a few resources for evaluating masks for children:

<https://www.parenting.com/child/kf94-masks-for-kids/>

<https://nymag.com/strategist/article/where-to-buy-face-masks-for-kids.html>

<https://www.parents.com/health/kn95-masks-for-kids/>

<https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20210820/the-best-face-masks-for-kids-according-to-experts>

Thank you for all you are doing individually and as a community to ensure that our students can keep learning and growing.

Kim and the Health Team

Monday, January 3, 2022

Dear NGFS Community,

Welcome back from Winter Break. I hope the last two weeks held special times for our families and staff. I know that for many of us, the omicron variant interrupted plans and long awaited reunions. I'm sorry, it's not what any of us wanted or expected just a few short weeks ago.

It's difficult to remember what school life was like before COVID-19 but there are signs that we might be able to resume our treasured events and traditions in the spring. In the meantime, I am confident that our community will do what is required to keep our students and staff safely in school. Some have asked if we have plans to

return to remote learning until omicron passes; we do not. The last 20+ months have taught us that being in school is best, not only for students' academic progress but for their emotional and mental health.

The community of adults that surround our students have different views, levels of risk tolerance, backgrounds, opinions, and interests. These varied perspectives help our children, adolescents, and teens appreciate that we bring different strengths, challenges, and considerations to difficult times and circumstances. With all of our differences, the NGFS community has always been united in purpose and dedicated to the learning and wellbeing of our students. They come first. Always.

The next few weeks will be challenging but we will remain focused on caring for our students and each other. As we find our ways through the wilderness of this seemingly never ending pandemic, I feel privileged to be traveling with a community that remains committed to the teaching and learning that happens in and out of the classroom.

Happy New Year,

Kim

REMINDER: COVID Testing this Thursday and Friday

Please help us mitigate risk for the spread of COVID-19 after the busy winter holiday.

This week, K-12 students and NGFS staff (vaccinated, unvaccinated, travelers, and non-travelers) will be given a PCR test on Thursday (Lower School campus students) and Friday (Page-Frederiksen campus). Our school nurse Ivy Lanier will do the testing during the day, just as we did after the Thanksgiving break. Because this is an "assurance" testing event, students will continue to come to school while waiting for test results.

If students have known exposure, symptoms, or would otherwise fail the daily health screening, they will need to stay home until test results are received.

Please submit consent for testing on [this form](#) if you have not done so already. Please enter consent information for each K-12 student. Consent only needs to be given one time, so if you have already completed the form, you do not need to submit it again. If you have previously submitted consent, we will test your student. If you do not want your student tested, please contact the health team at health@ngfs.org.

New CDC Guidance

As you may know, there is [updated guidance from the CDC](#) that affects when students and staff can return to school after exposure or a positive test. As we've said before, we rely not only on guidance from the CDC but on advice from our county health department and local physicians. When students are permitted to return to school after exposure or can complete a shortened period of quarantine after infection or exposure, it is imperative that they wear their masks properly and consistently.

The ability to return to school early is entirely dependent upon the consistent use of a clean mask that is well fitted, i.e., fits snugly around the face and over the nose, and remains in place. If your student is unable to wear a mask properly and consistently, they will need to remain at home for a longer period of time. Please understand this is not a punitive measure but rather what is required to protect the health of the community and adhere to the new guidelines.

Vaccine Cards

In order to give families proper guidance, it is essential that we have copies of the most up-to-date vaccination information for your student. Please send in up to date vaccination cards to health@ngfs.org.

Vaccination

Guilford County is holding several COVID vaccine clinics. Please visit [this page](#) for more information.

REMINDER: Daily health screening is required

We discontinued the practice of checking that screenings have been completed while students are still in the car at drop-off; however, please remember that a screening for each student is still required in order to attend school each day. The screening can be completed through the app or through [this link](#) in any web browser.

We know mornings can be hectic, but this measure is essential for monitoring the health of our community. Please make every effort to complete the screening each morning.

Thank you,

NGFS Health team