



August 6, 2021

Dear School Families:

We look forward to welcoming you and your children back soon. It is amazing to realize that a year ago we were unsure about how or if we would be able to open schools for in-person instruction. Today, with a successful year of experience, we are about to begin a new school year with greater confidence.

When we provided school safety protocols and operational guidance on July 19, we noted there was a potential for adjustments as the course of the pandemic, particularly the impact of the Delta variant remained unpredictable. Today, we must update that communication to align with new developments. Governor Pritzker, citing rising rates of infections and hospitalizations, including among children has announced a mask mandate for all public and private schools in Illinois. Under this mandate, all adult school employees and children in grades pre-K through 12 must wear a mask while indoors. Masks are not required for outdoor activities, including sports.

We will comply with the State of Illinois mandate to help our schools remain the places of safety they have been. Therefore, masks must be worn by everyone entering our school buildings (teachers and staff, parents, students, volunteers, etc.) while indoors, regardless of vaccination status.

We will monitor mandates and guidance from civil officials and public health authorities to help determine potential changes to our masking policies and other protocols. We know many parents have expressed a preference for masks to be optional for those who are vaccinated. When conditions allow, our preference is to transition to a policy under which vaccinated individuals will not be required to wear a mask indoors.

Please note that the wearing of masks indoors will dramatically reduce the need to quarantine students and staff in the event of a positive case.

We are pleased that many other protocols that were in place last school year will no longer be in effect. As we communicated on July 19, we will return to near-pre-pandemic operations. These include:

- No division of classes into cohorts
- No pandemic-related arrival/departure requirements such as wellness checks and staggered arrivals/departures
- Resumption of school Masses, lunch schedules and services, library/science/computer lab access, locker access, and parent-teacher conferences
- Resumption of extra-curricular activities including athletics, theater, music, clubs and field trips
- Resumption of before-and after-care programs

For additional details on our back-to-school guidance, please refer to the OCS Operating Framework on our [Back to School 2020/21 page](#).

We would like to highlight three topics as they represent the most frequently asked questions.

1. MASKING

- Pursuant to the State of Illinois mandate, masks will be required for students, teachers and staff, regardless of vaccination status in all schools and other archdiocese facilities to start the school year.
- No masks are required outdoors, regardless of vaccination status.

2. ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE PROCEDURES

All individuals must remain at home when sick or experiencing any symptoms to minimize the chance of spreading COVID-19 or other illnesses. COVID-19 diagnoses and close contact cases must be reported to your school office. Please see below for examples.

COVID-19-Specific Quarantine Guidance:

Quarantine Procedures for Close Contacts

- Pursuant to CDC guidelines, students/faculty/staff who are masked and maintain 3 feet of physical distance from the positive individual in school do not need to quarantine. This should result in far fewer people quarantined.
- Vaccinated students/faculty/staff do not need to be quarantined if they are asymptomatic and have submitted proof of their vaccination to their school office.
- Unvaccinated students/faculty/staff who are close contacts to positive household members, including siblings, must be quarantined.

Quarantine Procedures for Symptomatic or COVID-19-Positive Individuals

- All symptomatic individuals must remain home, regardless of vaccination status.
- If symptoms last longer than 24 hours, individuals must receive a negative COVID-19 test or alternative medical diagnosis prior to returning to school.
- Any individual who tests positive for COVID-19 must isolate for 10 days from the date symptoms first appeared or the date of a positive test result.

We will continue to monitor updates to the quarantine guidelines and communicate them to our school community.

3. TRAVEL

We will follow the [City of Chicago Travel Advisory](#) for all schools, whether they are located in Chicago, Lake County or Cook County. The Advisory currently includes the following requirements:

- Domestic Travel
 - Fully vaccinated students/teachers/staff do not need post-travel COVID-19 testing or self-quarantines as long as they are asymptomatic and provide proof of vaccination.
 - Unvaccinated students/teachers/staff must follow the prevailing post-travel quarantine recommendations when traveling from states and territories under a City of Chicago Travel Advisory. This currently means a 10-day quarantine OR proof of a negative test no earlier than 72 hours prior to returning to the Chicago area (or any time post return, though an individual must quarantine until a negative test result is received). A negative test requires no quarantine period.
- International Travel
 - The CDC currently requires a negative COVID-19 test or proof of recovery to board a plane to the United States. Because of this negative test, there is no required quarantine upon arrival, regardless of vaccination status.

We join with Pope Francis, Cardinal Blase Cupich and our bishops in encouraging vaccination for all eligible individuals, including faculty, staff and students 12 years of age or older.

We know this setback in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic is discouraging, but with your cooperation, we will be doing our part to limit its impact on our communities. This a time when we have the opportunity to look beyond our individual preferences and act to promote the common good.