

**Belmont Public School Fall 2021 Back to School FAQ  
(August 16, 2021)**

**1. What is the most recent guidance the School Committee and the School Department use regarding the Delta variant and safe return to school?**

The School Department, the district Health Team, and the School Committee utilized the documents below to inform our discussions regarding mitigation. These documents informed and recommended strategies to open schools safely, keep schools open, and keep teaching and learning uninterrupted for our students and staff:

[Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) - August 5, 2021

[CDC Summary of recent changes](#) - July 27, 2021

[American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#) - July 19, 2021

[Massachusetts Department of Health](#) - July 30, 2021

[Department of Elementary and Secondary Education \(DESE\)](#) - July 30, 2021

[Town of Belmont Mandate](#) - August 6, 2021

The chart below summarizes the key areas of guidance from DESE, DPH, CDC, and AAP as of the School Committee August 10 meeting. Please note that we anticipate that guidance from public health organizations will change and evolve over time. To view the following charts on the website, please go to the [August 10, 2021 presentation to the School Committee](#).

	DESE / DPH	CDC	AAP
<b>Masking K-6: Indoors</b> (students & staff)	Strongly recommended	<u>Vaccinated</u> : Recommended <u>Unvaccinated</u> : Recommended	Recommended
<b>Masking K-6: Outdoors</b> (students & staff)	Not necessary	May Be Recommended <a href="#">CDC Guidance – August 5, 2021</a>	No guidance offered
<b>Masking 7-12: Unvaccinated</b> (students & staff)	<u>Indoors</u> : Recommended <u>Outdoors</u> : Not necessary	<u>Indoors</u> : Recommended <u>Outdoors</u> : May Be Recommended <a href="#">CDC Guidance – August 5, 2021</a>	<u>Indoors</u> : Recommended <u>Outdoors</u> : No guidance offered
<b>Masking 7-12: Vaccinated</b> (students & staff)	<u>DPH</u> : Advised if in a home with unvaccinated or immunocompromised people (7/30/2021 updated guidance) <u>DESE</u> : Allow vaccinated students to remain unmasked; silent on vaccinated adults	Recommended	Recommended
<b>Distancing</b>	Not necessary	<u>Vaccinated</u> : No guidance offered <u>Unvaccinated</u> : 3 feet recommended (but not required*)	No guidance offered
<b>Cafeteria</b>	Masks may be removed No distancing guidance offered	No mask guidance offered Distancing not required if vaccinated	No guidance offered
<b>Vaccination</b>	Encouraged school sites for vaccinations; additional guidance to come...	Recommended	Recommended
<b>Testing</b>	Encouraged; additional guidance to come...	Recommended for symptomatic cases and as a prevention strategy	No guidance offered
<b>Contact Tracing &amp; Quarantining</b>	Additional guidance to come...	<u>Vaccinated</u> : Not recommended if symptom-free <u>Unvaccinated</u> : Recommended <a href="#">CDC Guidance – August 5, 2021</a>	No guidance offered
<b>Bus Transportation &amp; School Health Offices</b>	Masks required for all students and staff	Masks required	No guidance offered <sup>10</sup>

**2. Are children and staff wearing masks when returning to school?**

Yes. On August 10, the Belmont School Committee voted to accept the current universal mask mandate set by the Belmont Board of Health and the Select Board to wear face coverings in all indoor public spaces.

**3. Will drivers and students be required to wear masks on school buses?**

Yes. Public health experts have recommended masks, and we will be following the [state](#) and [federal public health order](#) and the [Town of Belmont](#) requirement to wear masks on buses.

**4. Will BPS require physical distancing in classrooms when we return to school?**

In order to have full in person return as mandated by DESE, the Belmont Public Schools will relax distancing in classrooms for the 2021-22 school year. This approach is consistent with guidance from DESE, DPH and CDC. The district will make every effort to organize classroom seating that maximizes the amount of space between desks given class size and the space in the classroom.

**5. Will BPS require physical distancing during lunch?**

In order to have full in person return as mandated by DESE, the Belmont Public Schools will relax distancing in cafeterias for the 2021-22 school year. This approach is consistent with guidance from DESE, DPH and CDC. The district will make every effort to organize cafeteria seating with physical distancing in mind. The district again rented tents for our elementary and middle schools to provide alternative space that will allow additional distancing for the fall. The district will not be using gymnasiums for lunch this year, as we are required to run a full schedule and utilize that space for our physical education classes.

**6. Will there be a new schedule this year?**

No. Per DESE mandate school days will operate on the pre-COVID class schedule. This information will be provided to you in communications from your principal closer to the start of school.

**7. Is there a remote option this year?**

No. Remote learning is no longer an option this school year per DESE. Please refer to the [DESE guidance on page 4](#) regarding their guidelines on this subject.

**8. How will you minimize disruptions for this school year?**

The district plans to utilize a variety of mitigation strategies to keep our students safe and minimize disruptions to learning. Please see the mitigation strategies we will continue to implement:

## Minimizing disruptions in 2020-2021

Given the DESE mandates for 2021-2022, we *still* have multiple mitigation strategies available to us this year. We will continue to:

- Encourage vaccinations
- Implement mask wearing protocols
- Utilize recommended cleaning protocols
- Utilize hand washing protocols
- Air exchange
- Space as much as possible
- Track, manage, and communicate positive cases to the community
- Utilize transportation protocols (mask wearing)
- Provide pool testing opportunities (in conjunction with BoH and other community organizations)
- Provide on-site vaccination opportunities (in conjunction with BoH and other community organizations)
- Encourage adherence to community health guidance outside of school

13

### **9. What are the current health metrics for Belmont?**

The Belmont Health Department calculated that as of August 9, 2021 the seven-day incidence rate for new COVID cases has increased locally to 87.56 cases per 100k. This puts Belmont firmly in the "substantial" risk category per CDC indoor masking guidance. Substantial risk is defined as 50-100 cases per 100k; High risk is above 100 cases per 100k. This means increased risk of transmission indoors is no longer just a concern for Middlesex County, but also now for us here locally in Belmont.

### **10. Will there be a testing and vaccination program at the schools?**

We will continue to explore partnerships with groups that provide testing and vaccination opportunities as feasible. We also will take advantage of any DESE funding and testing strategies offered. The BPS nursing staff will notify families when this can occur.

### **11. When school begins, what should a student or staff member do if experiencing symptoms?**

Monitor for symptoms and stay home when sick: Staff must monitor themselves for symptoms daily and students, with the assistance of families, must also be monitored daily for symptoms. Staff and students must stay home if feeling unwell. Everyone must do their part to protect others and not come to school if they are exhibiting any COVID-19 symptoms or are feeling sick. The Daily Symptom Checker and Quick Reference Scenarios are being updated and await more DESE guidance. Our nursing staff are actively receiving health updates and guidance from DESE and the DPH, and will be communicating these updates to our Belmont community.

### **12. What is the contact tracing and quarantine protocol for this school year?**

DESE and DPH have provided initial guidance on a "test and stay" policy for schools. More information is expected from DESE. Our nursing staff are actively receiving health updates and guidance from DESE and the DPH, and will be communicating these updates to our Belmont community.

**13. What are the current vaccination rates for Belmont students?**

Please see the table below for Belmont Public School student vaccination rates for students as of August 8 and August 9, 2021. The school department encourages everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated.

Grade	One Dose	Fully Vaccinated	Total Student Population as of 8/9/2021	% Partially Vaccinated	% Fully Vaccinated
12	12	268	334	3.6	80.2
11	13	250	325	4	76.9
10	17	282	344	4	81.9
9	15	273	356	4.2	76.6
8	16	288	373	4.3	77.2

**14. What are the health and safety rules for the performing arts and athletics?**

The performing arts department will be working out strategies to hold their traditional classes inside with masks. Whenever possible these groups will utilize outdoor space to relax mask-wearing protocols.

Our athletics department will follow MIAA rules on mask wearing for indoor and outdoor athletic events and practices in the fall. This guidance is not yet determined, and we will update the community when it becomes available.

**15. As we are heading into the beginning of the school year, what are the state’s travel restrictions?**

At this writing there are no travel restrictions in place. Please follow the [state travel guidance](#) if you are planning on going out of town. This guidance is updated so please see the latest version for safe travels and safe return to school. In addition to reading the latest guidance, if you have any further questions about your recent travel before or during the school year, please contact your school nurse.