



*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the  
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

## **On the Desktop - August 11, 2020**

### **Guidance for Districts and Schools on Interpreting DPH COVID-19 Metrics**

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Assistant Superintendents, Approved Special Education Schools, and Collaboratives,

There has been much discussion about COVID-19 health and safety metrics that can be helpful guidelines for when schools re-open this school year. Such metrics should serve as a guide as to whether schools should open using full-time in-person, hybrid, or remote models, and will also support future decision-making if the impact of COVID-19 requires us to switch between educational models throughout the school year.

Each Wednesday, the Department of Public Health releases its [Weekly COVID-19 Public Health Report](#) that contains critical metrics for each municipality. Effective this week, there will also be a color-coded indication posted for each municipality calculated on a rolling two-week basis.

- **Red** will designate communities with more than 8 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents.
- **Yellow** will designate communities that have more than 4 and up to 8 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents.
- **Green** will designate communities that have 4 or fewer COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents.
- **Unshaded** will designate communities with small populations and fewer than 5 cases within the last 14 days.

Because the impact of the virus is local, the concept of this particular COVID-19 health/safety designation is focused on the municipal level.

Following the release of these updated metrics, we are providing districts and schools with initial guidance on how to interpret them for school settings. These guidelines were developed in consultation with our infectious disease physicians and other public health experts.

### **General guidance for interpreting these metrics**

While average daily cases per 100,000 over a two-week period is the metric that determines the color-coding for each community, districts and schools should also monitor whether cases are increasing or decreasing as compared to the prior period. The local test positivity rate also

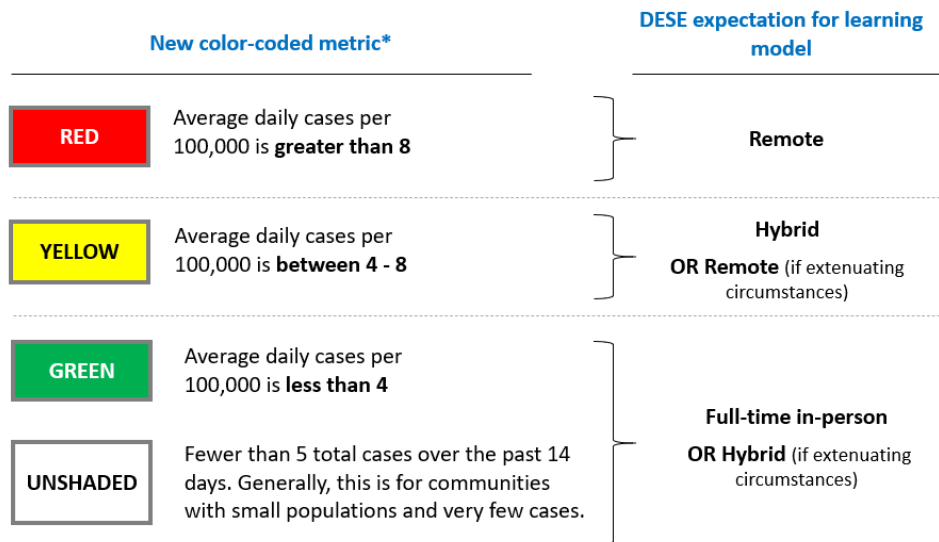
remains an important metric to monitor. In consultation with local boards of health, districts should consider whether these additional metrics and underlying data may indicate other concerning trends.

Please note that districts should look at multiple consecutive weekly COVID-19 reports to assess trends in order to inform any changes to their learning model for the start of the school year or to make any changes during the year.

For regional schools and others that draw from multiple cities and towns, DESE will issue additional guidance that points to the appropriate data to view for your context.

### Guidance for using these metrics to determine local learning models

Based on these updated weekly COVID-19 metrics, DESE’s guidance for how these data should inform each school and district’s learning model is as follows:



*\*Measured as a 14-day rolling average and will be reported weekly as part of the online DPH dashboard*

It is our expectation that districts’ learning models will follow this color-coded metric unless there are extenuating circumstances identified after consultation with local boards of health. This includes reviewing additional metrics, such as whether cases are increasing or decreasing, the local test positivity rate, and other contextual factors. Please see the attached slides.

We understand that local school committees and governing boards, working with district and school leaders, have recently finalized or are about to finalize initial fall reopening plans. We expect these updated metrics and related guidance will support your decision-making both for school reopening and throughout the year if we encounter changing circumstances.

While districts and schools may choose to make immediate adjustments to initial fall reopening plans based on this data, districts may also wait for multiple data reports and allow for further time for consultation before making these updates.

We acknowledge that you have much to consider as to how best to serve our students in ways that are safe for students, teachers, staff, families, and the community at large. It is our hope that this additional guidance can support you in these critical decisions.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Riley  
Commissioner