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**Oregon Department of Education**

# Every Layer Matters This Winter

# Communications Toolkit

December 2021

Dear School District Leaders and Education Partners,

This fall, schools welcomed all students back to full-time in-person learning. Let’s keep this positive momentum going for our students, staff, families and communities. Most decisions surrounding COVID-19 precautions remain at the school district level, allowing school leaders and communities to make decisions that serve students best.

As colder weather arrives in Oregon, we will all be spending more time indoors, which brings an increased risk of the spread of COVID-19. Just like we add layers of clothes in the winter to protect ourselves from the wet and cold weather, we must utilize the [layers of safety protocols](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/ODE_LayeredHealthSafetyMeasures_Filters.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) to protect one another from the spread of COVID-19 this winter and make sure those layers are in good condition.

Use the below key messages and resources **to initiate conversation and communication with staff, students, families and your community** about how to protect against COVID-19 this winter season. These messages are customizable and intended to serve as a starting point for school leaders to modify as needed to communicate with their community.

If you have any questions about this toolkit or need guidance in using some of the communications tools provided in this document, please contact [Sue Van Brocklin](mailto:sue@coateskokes.com) and [Lance Heisler](mailto:lance@coateskokes.com).

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## Key messages for school and district leaders: About winter and the holiday season

**The best tools:**

* COVID-19 continues to change with new variants and our knowledge about fighting the virus continues to grow over time.
* Right now, the best tools to protect students, families and staff are vaccination for those eligible, face coverings, physical distancing, staying home if ill or exposed to someone with COVID-19, ventilation and airflow, and hand hygiene. Opportunity for transmission decreases with each mitigation effort that is implemented.

**Winter and holiday messages include:**

* Think of vaccinations, face coverings, cohorts, increased ventilation and other protective measures like layered clothing for the winter weather. COVID-19 may be able to pass through one or two layers of protection, but not all, which is why every layer matters. Through this layered approach, we can keep learning in-person through the challenges of winter.
* Ensuring in-person instruction and the safe operation of school facilities are Oregon’s highest priorities. This goes hand-in-hand with supporting the health and safety of our students, staff and families. Schools not only provide the education that Oregon’s children need to succeed, but schools also provide mental health services and support (prevention, intervention and crisis services), nutritious meals and access to medical care.
* We can all agree that we want our kids in school, learning in-person every day; and we all want to protect students, school staff and the families as they return each day.
* Because schools are managed settings, with [**layered health and safety measures**](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/ODE_LayeredHealthSafetyMeasures_Filters.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery) in place, the risk of COVID-19 transmission can be lower than in general community settings without such protocols in place.
* As colder weather arrives in Oregon, we will all be spending more time indoors which brings increased risk of spread of COVID-19. Let's keep the learning in-person by checking and further strengthening protocols as we move indoors. The more focused we are now on health and safety protocols and communication, the better we can navigate this next season together.
* It’s important to know that most student-age COVID-19 transmission happens outside of school, (e.g., carpools, sports, community gatherings, parties, sleepovers, etc.) and then is brought into school. So, the more we can keep safety measures in place in school, the more we can reduce the spread of the virus and ensure more kids stay in school.
* Success means that our kids are in school consistently, which they need for their health and well-being as well as for their learning. And their families need it for economic stability and their health too.

**We know that people are getting weary:**

* We are all feeling “COVID fatigue”: Changing our behavior, wearing face coverings and physical distancing from friends and family is tiring, which can lead to burnout from the pandemic and can cause careless behaviors that contribute to a rise in cases.
* With winter weather here, we take care to keep ourselves protected:
  + We layer-up to protect ourselves from the cold, wind and wet weather.
  + And we spend more time indoors, where COVID-19 – especially delta and emerging variants – spreads more easily.
* This is an important time to layer up our health and safety protections to protect against COVID-19, just like we layer up against the cold and rain.
* The layers of health and safety protocols work together to protect students, staff and families. Each health and safety protocol offers a different method of protection, and these methods work most effectively together – every layer matters.

**Think of COVID-19 protection measures like layering up with extra coats, gloves and hats for winter weather. The more you layer up, the more protected you are.**

* There are health and safety layers in school buildings, as well as things that we can do as individuals and families at home.
  + **Vaccination:** Vaccination is the most effective tool we have to stay safe from COVID-19. Vaccination will also help keep our kids in school. Vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine unless they have symptoms. Household members who are 5 or older can receive a free COVID-19 vaccine, and appointments and walk-in clinics are available daily across the state. Help protect your child and their classmates, including those too young to get vaccinated, by making sure to vaccinate all eligible household members.

Individuals who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 do not need to quarantine upon exposure unless they develop symptoms.

* + **Face coverings:** Face coverings are effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19 and can reduce the need to be quarantined and miss in-person learning. Oregon currently requires face coverings for everyone five years of age or older in all public indoor spaces. With the delta variant circulating in our communities, it’s smart to also mask up whenever you’re with people from different households. And, if you and your child participate in carpools with other families, it’s safest for all to wear face coverings and roll the windows down for good air circulation.
  + **Physical distancing:** Maintain a minimum of 3-6 feet of physical distance for students and staff, to the extent possible.
  + **Cohorts:** Reducing the number of people who come into contact with each other is also important.
    - Establishing consistent groups of students (cohorts) that stay together for a significant portion of the day is a way to reduce spread of COVID-19, and to reduce the number of students and staff who may need to miss school for quarantine or isolation.
    - Using seating charts during lunch and on buses makes it easier to know which students have been in close contact with a case, should someone in the school have COVID-19.
  + **Isolation and quarantine protocols:**
    - Stay home when you are sick to reduce the spread of any virus, including the virus that causes COVID-19. This is isolation.
    - Take time to see if you are sick when you’ve been exposed to COVID-19; this reduces the chance that you will spread the virus.
    - We prioritize vaccination, face coverings, physical distancing and changes to our buildings first because it can prevent unnecessary school and classroom closures, which we all know is not what we want for our students and families.
  + **COVID-19 testing:**
    - Diagnostic testing for students with COVID-19 symptoms at school is a quick and effective way to limit virus spread and protect the health of our children. Schools can opt into OHA’s free diagnostic testing program at any time.
    - Once enrolled in OHA’s diagnostic testing program, schools can use the test to stay protocol. [Test to stay](https://www-auth.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Test%20to%20Stay%20Brief.pdf) is a form of modified quarantine that allows unvaccinated students or staff exposed to COVID-19 in school settings to continue to attend school during quarantine, providing they are symptom-free AND test negative when exposure is known, and 5 to 7 days after exposure.
  + **Airflow and circulation:** Schools continue to pay attention to bringing fresh outside air into indoor spaces; this increases airflow and circulation to remove virus-containing particles from the air. Schools have and will continue to look for opportunities to get students outside of the classroom, where the ability to physically distance and access fresh air is more easily available. These opportunities can include PE, meal times and other general classroom lessons.
  + **Handwashing and cleaning/disinfecting:** Regular cleaning and disinfecting when someone in the school has tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 24 hours will continue throughout winter.
  + **Exclusion chart:** School leaders can refer to the [exclusion summary](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Symptom-based%20Exclusion%20Chart.pdf) chart to understand when to exclude an individual from the school setting.

**There are a few requirements from the state that each school district is required to follow**.

* These are requirements that exist in federal or state law or rule.
* [The Oregon Health Authority’s statewide rule](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/ORED/bulletins/2fd9ea0) requires face coverings for anyone 5 years of age or older in all K-12 indoor settings. Individuals 2 years old or older must wear a face covering on school buses.
* [OAR 333-019-1030](https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/viewSingleRule.action?ruleVrsnRsn=280616) requires school and school-based programs staff as well as volunteers and contractors in all schools and school-based programs to be fully vaccinated.
* Other requirements include maintaining a communicable disease management plan, excluding students and staff who may have been exposed to certain illnesses, maintaining an isolation space in schools and submitting a plan for operation.
* In \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ School District, we are requiring [Insert local details] …

## Letter/email to students and families ahead of the holidays and winter

***Use this letter/email to help build awareness and understanding about the importance to stay vigilant and protect students, staff and families during the holidays and the winter season. Let students, parents and families know how they can support these efforts and where to go for more information.***

If you need additional support or have questions, please contact Sue Van Brocklin (sue@coateskokes.com) and Lance Heisler (lance@coateskokes.com).

Suggested subject line: Staying protected from COVID-19 this holiday and winter season

Dear Students & Families,

Everyone in our school community has been diligently following health and safety measures to keep COVID-19 from disrupting in-person learning.

As we enter the holiday season and winter months ahead, it is important to remember our communities will be living with COVID-19 until there is widespread immunity. As COVID-19 continues to change with new variants, our knowledge of mitigation efforts grows over time.

We can all agree that we want our kids in school, learning in-person every day; and we all want to protect students, school staff and the families as they return each day.

It’s important to know that most COVID-19 transmission happens outside of school, (e.g., carpools, sports, community gatherings, parties, sleepovers, etc.) and then is brought into school. So, the more we can keep safety measures in place in school and at home, the more we can reduce spread of the virus and ensure more kids stay in school.

Success means that our students are in school consistently, which they need for their health and well-being as well as for their learning. And their families need it for economic stability and their health too.

We want to remind everyone that the best tools to protect ourselves and one another are vaccination for those eligible, wearing face coverings, physical distancing, staying home if you feel sick or you know you’ve been exposed to someone with COVID-19, ventilation and airflow, and hand hygiene

*Optional Sentence:* Think of COVID-19 protection measures like layering up with extra coats, gloves and hats for winter weather. The more you layer up, the more protected you are.

The best person to contact should you have questions is: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Wishing you a happy and safe holiday season,

Insert Name

## Holiday and winter health and safety protocols fact sheet

It’s important to know that most COVID-19 transmission happens outside of school, (e.g., carpools, sports, community gatherings, parties, sleepovers, etc.) and then is brought into school. So, the more we can keep safety measures in place in school and at home, especially with delta and other new variants, the more we can reduce spread of the virus and ensure more kids can come to school and learn, grow and thrive.

Key measures for school districts that remain required include: Face coverings in all indoor school settings and on school buses; vaccinations for staff, contractors and volunteers in all schools and school-based programs; maintaining a communicable disease plan; maintaining an isolation space in schools and submitting a plan for operation.

**Vaccination**: Everyone age 5 and older is eligible for a vaccine. Vaccination of students and staff is [insert local details (i.e., not required / optional / encouraged)] and not required to come to school. Vaccination supports a student’s access to in-person learning, sports and extracurricular activities. Fully vaccinated individuals who are exposed to COVID-19 are not required to quarantine unless they develop symptoms. When as many eligible students and staff are vaccinated as possible, our school is better able to serve students and families without interruption.

**Face Coverings**: Face coverings are required for students and staff both indoors during school hours or during school-related activities. [Insert local details] **Face coverings are required on public transit, including school buses, for passengers and drivers until lifted by the federal government.**

**Physical Distancing:** We will support physical distancing in all daily activities and instruction, maintaining at least 3 feet between students to the extent possible. Our schools have signs and visuals to remind students, staff and visitors.

* Classrooms [Insert local details]
* Hallways [Insert local details]
* Entrances [Insert local details]
* Transitions [Insert local details]
* Lunch [Insert local details]

**Cohorting**: [Insert local details]

**Ventilation and Airflow:** [Insert local details]

**Handwashing:** Hand washing will be taught and encouraged. Students and staff will have access to soap and water and hand sanitizer. [Insert local details]

**Responding to COVID-19 Cases or Outbreaks**

We want you to know it is a priority for our school district to create a learning environment where your child feels safe, cared for, and connected to peers and school staff.

**COVID-19 testing:** At the start of the school year, there were [three testing options schools could use](https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/le3868.pdf) to identify COVID-19 infections early and help slow transmission in K-12 settings. In November, a [test to stay protocol was launched](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/ORED/bulletins/2fd9ea0) as part of the Diagnostic Testing program. Test to stay is a modified form of quarantine where students and staff who are exposed at school may continue to attend school and to participate in school-related extracurricular activities, provided they tested negative and had no symptoms.

**When staff and students show symptoms of being ill:** If the student or staff member feels ill prior to coming to school, they should stay home. If a student or staff member becomes ill at school, we will have a designated location to separate people who have symptoms of COVID-19 from people who are not sick. [Insert local details]

**When a staff member or a student tests positive for COVID-19**: Our school district will work with our local public health authority to take next steps. This will include communicating to our school community and contacting those who may have been exposed. [Insert local details]

CDC guidance states that people who are [fully vaccinated](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/keythingstoknow.html#:~:text=People%20are%20considered%20fully%20vaccinated,COVID%2D19%20vaccine.) and do not have COVID-19 symptoms do not need to quarantine or get tested after an exposure to someone with COVID-19.

## Sample social media posts for the holidays and winter

***The following social media posts are intended to be used as a starting point for federally recognized tribes, community-based organizations, schools, school districts or PTAs to share with students, families, teachers, staff or community members. These are customizable, so please feel free to adjust for tone, voice and framing to better suit your needs and the people you plan to send it to.***

If you need additional support or have questions, please contact Sue Van Brocklin (sue@coateskokes.com) and Lance Heisler (lance@coateskokes.com).

**ODE Sample Social Media Post Copy Options**

* We are all feeling COVID fatigue. Changing our behavior, wearing face coverings and physical distancing is tiring, but still important, especially with delta and other variants. Just like we layer up to protect ourselves from winter weather, a layered approach to address COVID-19 can keep kids in school: vaccinations, face coverings, ventilation, cohorts and hand washing are just a few protective layers that help. ✏🍎🏫🚸❄ Learn more at Oregon.gov/readyschools #ReadySchools #Oregon #Oredu
* This is an important time to layer up our health and safety protections to protect against COVID-19, just like we layer up against the cold and rain ☔🌨. The layers of health and safety protocols work together to protect students, staff and families. Learn more at Oregon.gov/readyschools #ReadySchools #Oregon #Oredu
* Think of vaccinations, face coverings, cohorts, increased ventilation and other protective measures like layered clothing for the winter weather. Every layer matters. Through a layered health and safety approach, we can keep in-person learning alive through the challenges of winter. ✏🍎🏫🚸❄ For more information about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ School District’s health and safety plan for the school year, visit Oregon.gov/readyschools#ReadySchools #Oregon #Oredu
* Schools not only provide the education that Oregon’s children need to succeed, but also provide mental health services, nutritious meals and access to health care. If we work together to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it ensures kids will remain in school this winter season. ✏🍎🏫🚸❄ Learn more at Oregon.gov/readyschools #ReadySchools #Oregon #Oredu
* We can all agree that we want our kids in school, learning in-person every day; and we all want to protect students, school staff and families as they return each day. Vaccinations, face coverings, cohorts, increased ventilation and other protective measures will keep our kids in school this winter. ✏🍎🏫🚸❄ Learn more at Oregon.gov/readyschools #ReadySchools #Oregon #Oredu
* Most COVID-19 transmission happens outside of school, (e.g., carpools 🚗, sports🤸🏾‍♀️, community gatherings 🏫, parties 🎉, sleepovers 💤, etc.). The more we can keep safety measures in place in school and at home, the more we can reduce spread of the virus and ensure kids stay in school this winter ❄. Learn more at Oregon.gov/readyschools #ReadySchools #Oregon #Oredu
* Success means that our kids are in school consistently, which they need for their health and well-being as well as for their learning. During the holidays and throughout winter, following COVID-19 safety measures at school and at home can ensure that school stays in-person. ✏🍎🏫🚸❄ Learn more at Oregon.gov/readyschools #ReadySchools #Oregon #ORedu

## Talking points for a school meeting or news interview this winter or holiday season

If you need additional support or have questions, please contact Sue Van Brocklin (sue@coateskokes.com) and Lance Heisler (lance@coateskokes.com).

**Using the layering approach for health and safety protocols includes both individual and school (system) responsibilities.**

* It’s our highest priority to keep our kids learning in-person every day and we care about delivering on our promise to keep children safe and in school.
* The coming of winter means students and families will be spending more time indoors where COVID-19 can spread more readily.
* Think of COVID-19 protection measures like layering up with extra coats, gloves and hats for winter weather. The more you layer up, the more protected you are.
* The multi-layered approach allows Oregon’s students to stay in school full-time even during winter when we’re indoors more often.
* Getting vaccinated is the most reliable and effective way to keep your child learning in-person.
* Schools are responsible for creating and maintaining a safe environment. This means establishing routines and systems that everyone in a school building can count on.
  + This includes markings that support 3 to 6 feet of physical distance;
  + Using seating charts in all settings and creating cohorts so that the school knows and limits the number of students who are in close contact with one another;
  + Improving air circulation and ventilation; and
  + Providing COVID-19 testing for students and staff. [Outline here the school’s testing procedures.]

**Our priority statewide is to hold in-person school reliably and safely, every day, all year long.**

* For students, in-person learning is essential for overall well-being. This includes social interactions with peers and caring and trusting relationships with teachers and other adults.
* Students are depending on us to deliver a school experience where care, connection and learning is centered.
* For students, many rely on school for breakfast, a warm lunch and counseling services. Staying home under quarantine and missing out on in-school services and time with teachers and friends is a much larger hurdle than the inconvenience of wearing face coverings.
* For parents and families, they need consistency, and for many, school is a way to ensure they can go to work and support their family.

**Schools have dedicated funding to invest in their efforts to layer health and safety protocols and maintain successful in-person learning.**

* Oregon received an unprecedented $1.1 billion in federal funding to help safely reopen schools and sustain school operations.
* These funds are from the American Rescue Plan Act.

**It’s important to acknowledge that Oregon and across the country, educators are experiencing fatigue, staff shortages, and more.**

* We are all feeling COVID fatigue. Changing our behavior, wearing face coverings and physical distancing is tiring, but still important.

**Implementing layered health and safety protocols depends on clear communication and training.**

* The caring adults inside our schools are critical partners to carry out these efforts.
* As partners and key supporters, create space for two-way dialogue, time for questions, and opportunities to share what’s working and what needs to be improved.
* Teachers and school staff rely on clear protocols and up-to-date information in order to carry out their jobs and serve children.