

Dept. of Health Services: Urges public health practices to keep kids safe and in school

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As students return to school in January, Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) is asking all Wisconsin parents and guardians to [take action to help slow the spread of Omicron](#) and keep children safe in schools. DHS urges parents and guardians to collaborate with local leaders, school officials, and public health on the following actions:

- Get your child vaccinated for COVID-19, including a booster dose as soon as they are eligible.
- Ensure your child properly wears a [well-fitting mask\(link is external\)](#) in all public indoor spaces, including schools, even if it is not required.
- [Get your child tested for COVID-19](#) if they are experiencing symptoms or have had close contact with someone with COVID-19.
- Keep your child home from school and other activities to isolate and quarantine if they test positive for or are exposed to COVID-19.

“With Omicron cases surging in Wisconsin and schools returning from holiday break next week, there is considerable concern that the number of children becoming infected with COVID-19 will increase – having major ripple effects for community transmission and COVID-19 hospitalizations.” said Dr. Ryan Westergaard, Chief Medical Officer and State Epidemiologist. “All Wisconsinites have a responsibility to help protect the health and well-being of children, especially those who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated or receive a booster dose, by engaging in layered COVID-19 mitigation strategies.”

As the Omicron variant of COVID-19 circulates throughout the country, states have

seen an increase in the number of pediatric hospitalizations associated with COVID-19. Although pediatric hospitalization levels remain stable in Wisconsin, children 18 years and younger make up the largest proportion of new daily COVID-19 cases in the state. DHS is watching data from other states closely. While preliminary data suggests the Omicron variant may cause milder illness compared to the Delta variant, the highly contagious nature is increasing the overall number of infections, thus increasing the number of hospitalizations, including pediatric cases. The Delta variant also continues to be in wide circulation in Wisconsin and is a major contributor to COVID-19 hospitalizations.

“We know how important in-person instruction is for our learners, families, and our communities,” said State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly. “Keeping our schools open at this critical moment is the right choice, but it requires a collective effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 – this means getting vaccinated, wearing a mask, and following testing and safety protocols. We all have to do our part to make sure our learners and educators can maintain safe and healthy classrooms.”

On December 20, DHS issued a [public health advisory](#) calling on all Wisconsinites to take urgent action to prevent additional hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID-19. We all have a critical role to play in stopping the spread. To find a COVID-19 vaccine provider in your community, visit [Vaccines.gov\(link is external\)](#), or call 211 or 877-947-2211. For up-to-date information about Wisconsin’s COVID-19 response, visit the [DHS COVID-19 webpage](#). We encourage you to follow @DHSWI on [Facebook\(link is external\)](#), [Twitter\(link is external\)](#), or dhs.wi on [Instagram\(link is external\)](#) for more information on COVID-19.