



Vermont Pediatricians Support Adapting Policies on Testing & Contact Tracing to Keep Schools Safe

January 11th, 2022 - The American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter (AAPVT) supports the direction that the Agency of Education is moving in adapting contact tracing and surveillance testing practices. The proposed model will only be successful with easy access to and adequate availability of rapid tests for all students, educators and school staff. Keeping our children safe is the number one priority and the mission of the AAPVT, keeping them in school is an integral part of that.

With the high rate of community transmission of COVID in Vermont, it is no longer feasible or helpful to continue with the status quo. We must change the way we approach this more transmissible variant and follow the data and the evidence to not only keep our children safe, but to also lessen the burden on our schools.

Ready access to rapid testing, along with strategic use of testing, will reduce burden on school staff while allowing for identification of new cases. This will be more effective than the current model of surveillance testing which tests only a small percentage of people on a regular schedule to catch cases that might otherwise have been missed. But we know that COVID is prevalent in the communities, so we don't need to conduct large group surveillance. Instead, individuals need to know when they are infected in a timely manner so they can isolate while infectious.

AAPVT is dedicated to the health and wellbeing of Vermont's children and families. Vermont pediatricians have been working throughout the pandemic to develop and refine protocols to prevent and mitigate the effects of COVID on **children**. In order to do this, pediatricians meet regularly with the Vermont Department of Health, school nurses, and the Agency of Education to provide input on a wide variety of child health issues involving COVID and school safety.

We continue to strongly advocate for universal masking regardless of vaccine coverage rate or vaccination status. And as always, school staff and students **must** stay home when sick.

To that end, the AAPVT supports adapting policies on testing and contract tracing in schools by implementing the following:

- School nurses should have the resources to provide on-site diagnostic testing to symptomatic students and staff with rapid antigen tests. They should have the ability to provide take-home antigen or PCR testing to these symptomatic individuals.

Vermont Chapter

INCORPORATED IN VERMONT

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



Vermont Pediatricians dedicated to improving the physical, mental, and social health and well-being of the state's infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

- Students and staff should have ready access to at-home rapid antigen tests regardless of vaccination status. These tests may be used for: asymptomatic screening, testing in symptomatic individuals, testing after close contact, shortening isolation after COVID infection.
- Given the shortened incubation period of the omicron variant, both PCR surveillance testing and contact tracing are less impactful and should be stopped in favor of diagnostic testing in schools and take-home tests for the above indications.

For the childcare setting:

- We support the “Tests for Tots” program which provides at-home antigen tests to unvaccinated close contacts so that they may remain in the childcare setting if asymptomatic and test negative.
- We request additional access to at-home rapid antigen testing for children and childcare staff for the same indications as K-12: asymptomatic screening, testing in symptomatic individuals, testing after close contact, shortening isolation after COVID infection.
- Given that take-home antigen tests are not authorized for individuals under 2 years of age, we request prioritization of alternative testing opportunities for this population.

The American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter is grateful for everything that is being done in our schools to keep children safe and for the incredible efforts by our school administrators, educators, nurses, and all school staff.