



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF EDUCATION
AND
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
ONE ASHBURTON PLACE

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JAMES A. PEYSER
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February 15, 2022

Dear Public and Private Higher Education Presidents,

Today, the Commonwealth updated its mask advisory in recognition of Massachusetts' place as a national leader in vaccine acceptance, and in light of recent positive progress on COVID-19 indicators. The Department of Public Health now advises that a fully vaccinated person should wear a mask or face covering when indoors (and not in your own home) if you have a weakened immune system, or if you are at increased risk for severe disease because of your age or an underlying medical condition, or if someone in your household has a weakened immune system, is at increased risk for severe disease or is unvaccinated.

Individuals who are not fully vaccinated should continue to wear a face covering or mask to help prevent spreading COVID-19 to other people. For more information on the updated advisory, please see www.mass.gov/MaskRules.

Last week, Governor Baker announced that the statewide mask mandate for childcare and K-12 schools would not be extended past the previously planned February 28 expiration date. In making his announcement, the Governor said the following: *"From free, convenient testing, to highly effective vaccines and breakthrough treatments, everyone now has the tools and the knowledge to stay safe from COVID. Given the extremely low risk for young people, the widespread availability and the proven effectiveness of vaccines, and the distribution of accurate tests, it's time to give our kids a sense of normalcy and lift the mask mandate for schools."*

The Governor's comments could clearly apply to higher education, as well, where virtually all students and staff are fully vaccinated, robust testing systems and resources are well established, and a majority of individuals are in low-risk age groups. As I'm sure you're also aware, several higher education institutions have already shifted their policies regarding mask wearing. For example, WPI has made masks optional in residential halls and other indoor shared spaces, with some specified exceptions. This is a welcome step towards the return to normalcy that our students need and we strongly encourage all higher education institutions to consider similar measures.

As we suggested in our previous letter: *"Colleges and universities should accelerate their efforts to transition back to 'near normal' conditions, which include focusing on individuals who manifest COVID symptoms and test positive for COVID, and especially those who are particularly at-risk for serious illness and hospitalization."*

Individuals who are considered close contacts or who have tested positive must follow the [isolation and quarantine guidance](#) which includes wearing a mask in public for 5 more days after leaving isolation or quarantine on day 5, regardless of vaccination status.

All people in Massachusetts (regardless of vaccination status) are required to continue wearing face coverings in certain settings, including transportation and health care facilities. Please see www.mass.gov/maskrules for a complete list of venues where face coverings have remained mandatory since May 29, 2021.

Given our strong collaboration over these past two years, we would encourage institutions of higher education to review their masking policies and consider the longer term strategies for managing an endemic and strengthening our mental health supports for our students and personnel.

Sincerely,



James A. Peyser
Secretary of Education



Marylou Sudders, MSW, ACSW
Secretary of Health and Human Services