



CORONAVIRUS UPDATE FROM WELLESLEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND WELLESLEY HEALTH DEPARTMENT FOR NOVEMBER 21, 2020

Dear Members of the WPS Community:

We write to share some important updates regarding the coronavirus in advance of the Thanksgiving week.

First, we want to update you on the cluster of cases that was recently identified at Wellesley High School. The School Department, Health Department, and Facilities Management Department collaborated in a thorough investigation of these cases to better understand why, despite so many safety protocols in place, there was in-school transmission of the virus. This included a review of heating, ventilating and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems and air circulation, mapping movement patterns and locations of work stations, cleaning protocols, and many other areas of daily operations. The team concluded that the origin of the transmission of a large number of cases was the main office area and recommended a number of additional mitigation measures, including reducing the density of individuals in this area, better defining one-way entrance/egress, increasing air circulation, and modifying the use of plexiglass dividers. This last finding was both surprising and important for us, as our test of air circulation in this area using smoke devices clearly showed that in several cases, plexiglass dividers, when coupled with side panels, significantly impeded air circulation. All of these mitigation strategies will be in place when Wellesley High School reopens for in-person learning. In addition, the team will be reviewing and reassessing other school and town buildings based on these findings.

More broadly, however, the growing number of cases in our community continues to be a concern. While the majority of [WPS cases](#) have involved adult members of the school community, the number of student cases is steadily growing at the secondary level, with new cases identified at both the middle and high schools this week. (We have had no student cases at the elementary level to date.) This trend is also reflected in the most recent state metrics, with Wellesley now being designated as a moderate risk (Yellow) community for the first time. Please refer to the [Wellesley COVID-19 Hub](#) for updated town-wide information as well as the WPS website for more information on [school-based responses](#) to the virus.

With so many college students traveling home for Thanksgiving and the potential for increased contact with extended family members and friends, it will be more important than ever to strictly follow the CDC guidelines for wearing masks, social distancing, avoiding large gatherings, and hand washing. **The CDC is strongly encouraging families to avoid traveling for the holiday and limiting gatherings to household members only.** Please also refer to the WPS [Nursing Services](#) website for additional information on celebrating safely during the Thanksgiving holiday.

We also want to highlight the importance of following the updated travel guidelines from the Massachusetts Department of Health. As required by the [Massachusetts COVID-19 Travel Order](#), anyone from a high risk state must complete the Massachusetts travel form and quarantine for 14 days or have a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of arriving. With this change, the **ONLY** states that **are not high risk** are Hawaii, Vermont.

It is critical for WPS staff and parents to be aware of and adhere to these guidelines as your choices may significantly impact our ability to reopen schools for in-person education after the Thanksgiving weekend.

In short, let's all work to be vigilant as we strive to keep our schools open and our community safe. We are all in this together!

Sincerely,

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