

August 30, 2023

Greetings St. Stephen's,

I hope this message finds you well and settling in for another great school year.

About three years ago, the outbreak of COVID-19 began a period of unprecedented adjustment of how our community works to address the health and safety needs of its citizens. Schools, in particular, were faced with extraordinary challenges related to leading efforts to slow the spread of the virus while providing a consistently excellent educational experience. These efforts included distance learning, mask mandates, temperature checks, social distancing, and quarantine (to name a few specifics).

These actions were successful in slowing the spread of COVID and supporting the work of healthcare professionals. Over time, and with the creation of vaccines and other treatment options, COVID has evolved from a public health crisis into what is now generally seen as a seasonal illness event similar to the annual flu.

As such, the role schools play in addressing COVID has also evolved. Schools, once considered a primary decider in how students and families operated regarding COVID, are now doing what they have always done in cases of certain contagious events (i.e., strep and lice). Schools inform families of potential exposure and remind them of recommended steps to help their children. It is through this lens that St. Stephen's Episcopal School, Houston ("School") views our role in helping your family make decisions regarding your child's health related to COVID.

St. Stephen's COVID Response

Recently, we have seen some cases of COVID amongst students and staff. We have taken measures to inform relevant groups of potential exposure and shared links to the recommended CDC measures to be taken. We have also provided dates of exposure in order to help families count the days for exposure-related precautions.

On the staff side, we have encouraged staff to take precautions to help mitigate transmission per the CDC guidelines and have made masks, at-home tests, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies available as needed.

We require individuals who test positive to stay home until their isolation period ends, and they meet the guidelines for returning to campus per the CDC.

What You Can Expect: COVID Exposure

Going forward, when/if the School is informed of a positive COVID case, this is what the families in the affected homeroom class can expect.

- **Email.** An email will be sent from email@renweb.com. The email will provide: (1) that an individual in your student's homeroom class has tested positive for COVID, (2) the last date that the individual was on campus (i.e., last exposure to someone with COVID), (3) a link to the relevant CDC guidelines for your consideration (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/if-you-were-exposed.html>), and (4) any additional information that may be helpful to you as you make decisions for your child.
- **Text.** A text will be sent from 31706 asking you to check your Inbox for an email regarding COVID exposure.
- Generally, only one set of communications (text and email) will be sent for the first COVID case within a 10-day period (only) within a homeroom classroom.

What You Can Expect: COVID Isolation

Families should notify covid@ssesh.org if their student is exposed to or tests positive for any communicable disease, including COVID. Please include in the email a photo of the test result as well as the day your student first experienced COVID symptoms. You will receive an email with a day count for isolation purposes and the criteria for readmission to campus. We will also be including masking recommendations. If recommended, masks should be worn indoors as feasible by students in Primary and above.

What You Can Expect: Tracking and Other Precautions

St. Stephen's is tracking COVID cases within our School and community. We are also in contact with local medical experts regarding COVID. If conditions related to COVID change in a way that requires the School to consider pivoting to more restrictive measures, we will do so in consultation with healthcare professionals and with the interests of our students and staff in mind. All families will be duly informed of any revisions to St. Stephen's COVID response.

Please be well and reach out with any questions.

With gratitude,

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