



## PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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Hello school families,

As spring is upon us, here are several announcements from us in the local public health department:

**More infectious variant spreading:** There is a new strain of COVID-19 known as the B117 variant that is quickly becoming the most common type of the virus spreading throughout Minnesota. We have evidence that the B117 variant is in Cook County. B117 is 50% more infectious than the original strain, meaning it spreads more easily between people. Statewide, public health is finding that it also spreads more easily among children. The good news is that we know what will work to limit the impact of B117 on families and the community. The schools are doing an excellent job with following the safety measures in their preparedness plans. We need all families to continue to do their part in following public health advice: in public spaces wear a mask and socially distance, screen your kids before school each day for symptoms of COVID-19, if you feel sick get a COVID test and stay home from work or school, wash your hands frequently and avoid large crowds. This advice is for both people who are vaccinated and those who are not.

**Vaccination:** At this point, all people 16 and older are eligible for vaccination. Signing up for a vaccine is one of the most powerful things you can do to limit the impact of COVID-19 on our schools. People who are fully vaccinated (14 days after their second dose) are less likely to get sick with COVID and to pass the virus on to others. Additionally, if you are exposed to a person with COVID-19 and you are fully vaccinated, you do not need to quarantine. The vaccines we have available to us are safe, work well and will save lives.

**Vaccination for teens:** 16- and 17-year-old students are eligible for the Pfizer vaccine. This week on April 8 we have a vaccination event at North Shore Health where the Pfizer vaccine will be available. You can register online at [www.cookcountycovid19.org](http://www.cookcountycovid19.org). Anyone under the age of 18 needs a parent or guardian present at the time of vaccination. Parents are welcome to sign up for vaccination at the same as their children if that is convenient for families. We still have a few spots open for our event this Thursday.

**Surveillance testing:** The Minnesota Department of Health recommends that kids in school take a COVID-19 test every two weeks, and that students involved in sports and other extracurricular activities test every week. COVID-19 tests are free and are available locally through the mail-in saliva test program. You can [order test kits online](#) or you can pick-up a saliva test kit at your child's school. The tests include a telehealth appointment over Zoom. Afterwards, you return the test kits to a UPS drop site. You receive an email with your results within a few days. With routine testing, you do not need to quarantine while waiting for test results if you do not have symptoms.

The Cook County Public Health Department is always happy to answer parents' questions about the COVID-19 pandemic, including any questions you might have about the COVID-19 vaccines. The best way to connect is by email at [covid-19hotline@co.cook.mn.us](mailto:covid-19hotline@co.cook.mn.us) or by phone at 218-387-3605.

Thank you so much for all you've done to adapt to the difficult work of parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic, and for doing your best to raise healthy kids in a challenging year.

Be well,  
Grace

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*"...supporting the health, safety, and well-being of our community."*

[www.cookcountypphs.org](http://www.cookcountypphs.org)

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