



320 Cathedral Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
P: 410-547-5515
F: 410-547-5566

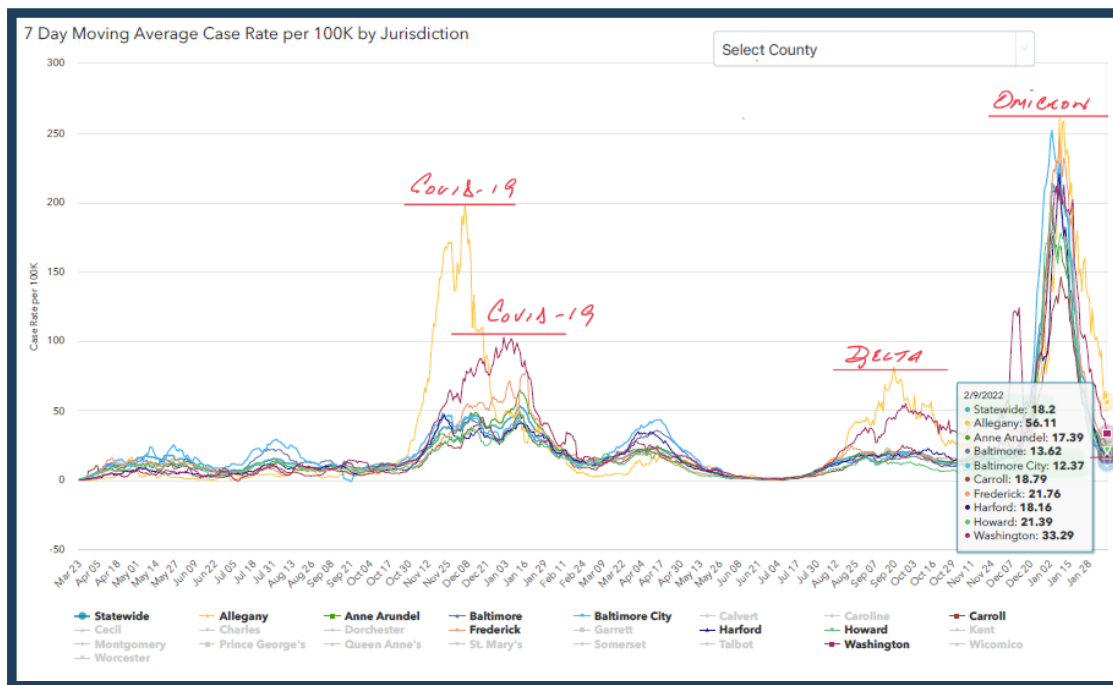
February 11, 2022

Dear Catholic School Parents and Guardians,

We would like to provide an update regarding the COVID-mitigation protocols in our Catholic schools. The Department of Catholic Schools remains committed to following health and safety measures relative to the coronavirus pandemic and will continue to evaluate our policies as the COVID landscape evolves in the region.

Since March of 2020, we have received COVID guidance from distinguished health and infectious disease experts, including former Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Director and current Senior Public Health Advisor to Governor Hogan, Dr. Robert Redfield. Their consultation and guidance has helped shape our COVID-mitigation strategy, which has enabled our schools to operate safely for in-person instruction.

Following recent discussions with this team of health experts, we have decided to update the masking policy for our schools. This policy change comes at a time when our region is witnessing a significant decline in COVID transmission rates from the Omicron variant that emerged in November and resulted in the highest daily case rate since the beginning of the pandemic. Please see the graph below showing the different rate hikes and drops since March 2020.



Beginning on **Monday, February 14, 2022**, the Department of Catholic Schools will transition all archdiocesan schools, where jurisdictions allow, to optional masking. For students, this option will be based on parental choice. Staff and visitors will also have the option to wear a mask or not. This applies to all individuals, regardless of vaccination status.

* Catholic schools located in Baltimore City are required to continue following the order issued by the Baltimore City Health Department, mandating masks in all schools until lifted by Mayor Brandon Scott.

** Face masks are required for all individuals while on public transportation conveyances, including public and private school buses and vans. School buses are subject to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention order requiring masks on public transportation, which was issued in January of 2021.

Anyone who would like to wear a mask may continue to do so, and is fully supported in their decision and should be treated with respect. Parents of child(ren) of any age or vaccination status may request their own child(ren) wear a mask; however, enforcement of this request is between the parent and child, not the school administration, faculty or staff. The movement to parental choice masking is about a parent's personal accountability and responsibility for the health and well-being of their children.

While the archdiocese is implementing parental choice for masking, all Catholic schools will adhere to CDC guidance relative to individuals who test positive for COVID-19 or who have been identified as a close contact outside of school by the health department or other health officials. Students and staff who test positive for COVID-19 and those who are unvaccinated and identified as a close contact, are required to wear a mask following their respective period of isolation or quarantine for five additional days. Those who are vaccinated and identified as a close contact are not required to quarantine; however, they must wear a mask while in school for 10 days following the date of exposure.

Please remain vigilant and monitor the health of all members of your household. Our ability to offer in-person instruction is dependent on your partnership. If a child is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, RSV, or Influenza, they should remain home to avoid exposing the school community to illness.

The safety and well-being of our students and staff remain our top priority. While COVID-19 vaccinations are not mandated in our schools, we encourage vaccination for all eligible students and staff to reduce the potential for serious illness and hospitalization. Catholic schools will continue to provide rapid antigen testing and surveillance testing to confirm symptomatic and identify asymptomatic cases that might contribute to an outbreak within a school community.

Let us pray that the road ahead offers hope for an end to illness and life under the shadow of COVID.

Thank you for your partnership and support.

Yours in Christ,



Mr. James Sellinger
Chancellor of Education



Dr. Donna Hargens
Superintendent

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