

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents and Independent Heads of School
FROM: Daniel M. French, Ed.D., Secretary of Education *DMF*
SUBJECT: Clarification on Use of Public Health Guidance in Schools
DATE: April 16, 2021

Purpose

The Agency of Education (AOE) and the Vermont Department of Health have received many questions about to what extent school districts and independent schools may impose stricter public health guidance than what is found in [A Strong and Healthy Year: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#).

Flexibility in Public Health Guidance

Vermont school districts and independent schools may not impose stricter or less permissive standards than those set by the Vermont Department of Health, as detailed in [A Strong and Healthy Year: Safety and Health Guidance for Vermont Schools](#) and the [Vermont Forward Plan](#).

For example, school districts and independent schools may not:

- Require different quarantine and/or testing requirements for out of state travel other than what is currently in force under the Vermont Forward Plan. As of the time of writing, Vermonters returning from out of state must receive a test within three days of return, but they are not required to quarantine in the meantime. Schools may not prevent students from coming to school while they are waiting for test results. Similarly, schools should no longer be screening for travel under updated Strong and Healthy Year Guidance. Finally, schools should not impose separate requirements for sports team travel.
- Use definition of a close contact or related definitions that are more restrictive than those used by the Vermont Department of Health. School districts may not, for example, require a student to remain home if one of their siblings is a close contact of a case.

Schools should closely follow Health Department recommendations before deciding to exclude students from attending school or when shifting to remote learning. Schools retain operational flexibility in making these decisions relative to logistical considerations such as staff availability but should defer to Health Department expertise in determining the public health risks relative to COVID-19.

Our goal at this stage of the COVID-19 pandemic is to increase in-person learning as much as practicably possible. We know that we can do so safely, and that it is beneficial for our students to do so. Our most recent updated guidance reflects new evidence and information and is designed to keep students, staff and families safe and healthy while meeting this goal of returning students to the classroom.