



BERKSHIRE WALDORF SCHOOL

Health and Safety Plan 2021-22



Dear Berkshire Waldorf School community,

You need to know that you and your children are safe. We have updated the school's safety protocols for the 2021-22 school year in response to the changing conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Your health and safety plan for BWS is based on the advice and input of our Medical Advisory Panel (MAP), comprised of three family physicians and BWS parents. They represent the lens of public health, front-line Covid response practices, and anthroposophical medicine. The MAP reviews up-to-date research to set and modify our protocols. Research from the original strain of Covid-19 is only partially reliable in planning around the Delta variant.

That is why we are beginning the year with extra caution. We are in a wave of increased local transmission due to the Delta variant. The protocols for you and your children will help protect us in this challenging time that we hope will be brief.

Certainty is one of the victims of the pandemic. We have learned, though, that operating a school in a pandemic is a community effort. We all need to participate in this plan to keep all of us safe.

Please read this plan in its entirety for the full picture of our health and safety plan for the start of school. The Health and Safety Town Hall, featuring the Medical Advisory Panel, will be held this Sunday, August 29 at 7 p.m.

BWS Board of Trustees

Our Health and Safety Priorities

- **Community Responsibility** - To minimize the risk of transmission, the whole community joins in participating in healthy practices and transparency. Follow the guidance for your local community when you are out and about and let us know if your family has had a known exposure to Covid-19. We will walk you through it.
- **Symptom Monitoring** - Take time each day to check that your children are healthy before you bring them to school. Take their temperature and check our symptom checker. If they have symptoms, keep them home and give us a call. No symptomatic children or adults can be on campus.
- **Universal Risk Mitigation** - Regardless of asymptomatic presentation or vaccination status, we are committed to risk mitigating practices, particularly when the background regional data is of concern.
- **Responsiveness** - When someone becomes ill, we know how to respond. Whether on campus or at home, whether it's a confirmed Covid case or other illness, we have protocols to help us through it.

In addition, the entirety of our plan is **responsive** to the state of our region. We are re-issuing this conservative plan in light of a current wave, but we look forward to modifying this plan as local cases decline again.

First, we encourage healthy behavior in our community. Then, we eliminate symptomatic carriers from the environment. Next, if an asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic carrier were to be on campus, we use risk mitigating measures to prevent transmission in our community. With these measures in place, we are able to move forward in community, including bringing families back together on campus.

Community Responsibility

Our ability to operate safely is directly dependent upon the unwavering commitment of every member of our community - students, faculty, staff and parents - to practice health and safety precautions in their family life outside of school.

- Take care to keep you and your family healthy. Eat well, get sleep, and stay active. Be mindful of mental and emotional health, too.
- Follow the transmission data in your local area and increase your vigilance when rates are on the rise. We are currently experiencing a heightened wave in our region. This is a time for practicing more vigilant risk mitigating behaviors in your family life.
- This is a time when statewide mandates may come into play. As these restrictions are modified, our community would be work within them once again.
- Let us know if your family has been exposed to Covid-19. Usually, only if your child is a primary contact will this affect sending your child to campus. When in doubt, call us.

Symptom Monitoring

Families are responsible for monitoring their children's health before bringing them to school. Symptomatic children will be separated from their class and sent home immediately. It is one of our teachers least favorite things to send a sick child away once they've arrived in their class. It's easiest on everyone not to send them to school when there is a sign of illness.

All families and employees will use a screening tool to complete a daily self-check of symptoms before leaving for school. The questions will help individuals to verify that they are symptom-free and ready for school.

Below is the full list of symptoms for which caregivers will monitor their children, and staff will monitor themselves:

- Fever (100.4° Fahrenheit or higher), chills or shaking chills
- Cough (not due to other known cause, such as a chronic cough)
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Muscle aches or body aches
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Headache (when in combination with other symptoms)
- Fatigue (when in combination with other symptoms)
- Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies, and when in combination with other symptoms)

Universal Risk Mitigation

If an asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic carrier were to be on campus, we use risk mitigating measures to prevent transmission in our community.

Behaviors that reduce the risk of transmission:

- Spend more time in **well-ventilated spaces**. Outdoors is great. There is next to no transmission outdoors. Windows open and/or the use of air circulating technology really helps.
- Keep air space between people, or **physically distance**. Providing space decreases the chance that enough viral matter will reach those around you.
- Wear a barrier, a **face mask**, to keep droplets of viral matter out of the air.
- Reduce the **time** you spend in other people's airspace. When determining primary contacts, you need to have spent 15 minutes, cumulatively, within 6 ft of a person confirmed positive.

1. Well-Ventilated Spaces/Using the Outdoors

- When in the classroom, the space is well-ventilated. In nicer weather, open windows are best. Our HVAC system also circulates fresh air into our buildings.
- All classes have outdoor covered spaces for learning and playing in. We have pavilions, cottage classrooms, and tents for teaching outside.



2. Physical Distancing



Image courtesy of Sarah Parrilla

- It is difficult to transmit Covid-19 at 6ft of distance, although the chance of transmission increases the more time you share airspace.
- Outdoors transmission is very low in general and practically non-existent if 3ft of distance is maintained
- Outdoor transmission is also unlikely when you are in motion with others, like when we play games or sports.
- We do not enforce physical distancing during children's play. We take greater care when we're remaining still for longer periods of time or eating, especially indoors.

3. Mask wearing

- In light of current regional data, the ascendancy of the Delta variant, as well as state mandates, we are reinstating a masking policy at all times when indoors.
- The Medical Advisory Panel is intermittently reviewing research on masking in schools, the current state of the pandemic, and public policies to help us make the best decisions in any given moment throughout the pandemic. Families will be informed of any updates to our masking policy.
- In general, masks are optional outdoors unless there is prolonged close clustering of people. Indoors, we will be masking.
- BWS recognizes that there are downsides to masking in schools and masks are an obstacle to contend with. With these concerns in mind, we advocate for an increase in outdoor learning when pandemic conditions dictate masking for indoor learning.
- Caregivers and family members must carry masks with them to campus and wear them when 3ft distance cannot be maintained outdoors and at all times in our buildings.



Mask Protocols

Masks in Early Childhood

- All children in our early childhood program should have 2 masks with them at school just as they have other protective gear at the ready each day.
- While outside and moving through play, masks are optional. Masks will be kept close by if needed.
- While inside masks will be worn, except during nap. It is not safe for children to sleep in a mask. Child are distanced during naps.
- Our faculty will model an easy and positive approach to wearing masks for our students, including advocating for mask breaks at regular intervals or when desired.
- Details on how mask routines will integrate with the rhythm of the day, recommended types of masks, and refreshing masks (no fabric softener please), etc. will be provided by your class teacher.
- Masks made from quilting cotton or disposable masks are acceptable. Masks with vents and valves are not permitted because they negate the benefits of wearing masks to protect others in this instance. We have disposable masks available if needed.

Masks in Grades 1 – 8

- All students in grades 1 through 8 will be expected to follow the same mask protocol. Masks are required indoors and optional outdoors. Masks may be deemed necessary in some outdoor circumstances where clustering is occurring for long periods of time.
- All students should have 2 masks available every day. Masks made from quilting cotton or disposable masks are acceptable. Masks with vents and valves are not permitted because they negate the benefits of wearing masks to protect others in this instance.
- Our faculty will model an easy and positive approach to wearing masks for our students, including advocating for mask breaks at regular intervals or when desired.
- Although we aim to spend the majority of our time outdoors, when we need to be indoors students will be required to wear masks, particularly when 6-ft of distancing is not possible, proper ventilation cannot be achieved, when students are moving about the space, or using common spaces such as hallways and bathrooms. When masks are used for any stretch of time, regular and substantial mask breaks are incorporated into the flow of work.

Responsiveness

We work hard to prevent events of Covid-19 on campus. However, if illness touches our community, we respond rapidly and methodically to prevent transmission. The following protocols outline how we respond to illness.

What to do when a child becomes ill at home

- If a child develops symptoms associated with COVID-19 while **at home**, they must stay home and please notify the school of their symptoms immediately. Our health and safety coordinator, Leslie Bissaillon, will listen to individual circumstances and walk families through any necessary steps for back to school clearance.
- We usually ask that a child be seen by their primary care physician.
- A child, or adult, with Covid-like symptoms needs to be fever-free for 24 hours, have symptoms resolving, and provide proof of a negative Covid test to return to school.
- If the family chooses not to obtain a Covid test for the child, there is a 10 day wait period for returning to school.
- Alternatively, the school can provide a form for their physician to fill out to clear the child for return to school providing there is a definitive cause of the symptoms other than Covid.

What we do when a child becomes ill at school

- When a child becomes ill at school, they must be picked up immediately.
- If the symptoms are consistent with Covid-19, the child will be escorted away from peers by a member of our team (usually Leslie Bissaillon) who is equipped with the appropriate PPE.
- If they are demonstrating Covid symptoms, they will wait in an area designated and designed for isolation. If, due to illness, they cannot walk across campus to the designated space, we will determine a safe spot nearby for them to rest until a caregiver arrives.
- We thoroughly clean and refresh the spaces where the child traveled, worked and played.
- We take note of any close contacts the child may have had over the past three days.
- Once the child is safely in the care of their families, we proceed with the family through the protocols on the previous page for determining next steps.

When a child has been exposed to Covid-19

- Families will be notified if there is a Covid exposure at school. **Please notify the school when your family has been exposed to Covid-19.** We will help you determine if your child is a primary or secondary contact. A series of protocols are engaged if your child is a primary contact. Secondary contacts may remain in school.
- A **primary contact** is a person who has been in contact with a person who had been confirmed positive for Covid for more than 15 minutes cumulatively, particularly at less than 6ft, but distance is less relevant if they've shared enclosed air space for a longer period of time.
- A **secondary contact** is a person who has been in contact with a primary contact. The only action with a secondary contact is to monitor the developments of the primary contact to whom they have been exposed. Families are informed if their child is a secondary contact.
- Primary contacts must isolate for a minimum of 5 days prior to obtaining a Covid test. Tests prior to 5 days are not reliable. The test they obtain must be a PCR test. The primary contact can return to school with a negative PCR test administered after 5 days, but requires 5 additional days of monitoring and heightened vigilance. Another test at 7 or 10 days may be requested.
- Every circumstance of exposure is idiosyncratic. Reach out to Leslie Bissailon, our Health and Safety Coordinator, and she will walk you through the rationale for any decisions in this regard.

School and Class Closure

Our top priority is to keep our community together on our beautiful campus. There are some circumstances that stand in the way of that goal, either at the class or school level.

- Each situation in which we learn of a community member who has been on campus following an exposure to or confirmed positive for Covid will be evaluated individually. Depending on the circumstances, we may close a class or group of classes while determining the best course of action. The families will be informed of the reason for closure.
- We allow for 2 days of closure before we engage a distance learning opportunity. Closures longer than 2 days would prompt a learning program for families to participate in from home.
- At this time, the circumstances that could prompt a school or departmental closure include evidence of in-school transmission and/or staffing shortage. If transmission begins to occur in school, we need to revisit our health and safety plan and make adjustments to restore confidence in our approach.

Vaccinations and Surveillance Testing

Here we address two additional risk mitigating measures, vaccinations and surveillance testing, and our stance on each.

Vaccinations

- We recommend that anyone eligible to receive a vaccination to this virus do so. Its greatest benefit is preventing death and severe illness in the recipient of the vaccine.
- We have not issued a vaccine mandate for Covid-19. A high percentage of our employees are presently vaccinated. Regardless of a mandate, at present, the state of Massachusetts dictates the acknowledgment of medical and religious exemptions to vaccines*.
- The data available on Covid and specifically the Delta variant, indicates breakthrough infections are occurring in vaccinated individuals. This combined with the symptom minimizing benefit of vaccines, creates the potential for a greater number of asymptomatic carriers in the community. The available data on the transmission rates of these breakthrough infections is insufficient. Due to this unknown, universal precautions are applied in an abundance of caution.

* We will never provide personal medical information about individuals in our community.

Surveillance Testing/Screening

- **Surveillance Testing** is testing the asymptomatic persons regardless of symptoms or exposure as a preventative measure or to collect data on the community.
- As an effective risk mitigating measure, the research supports that twice weekly testing of all community members would be effective in preventing undetected Covid transmission in school. Even most health care facilities are not equipped to provide this level of effective mitigation.
- Our Medical Advisory Panel has revisited testing protocols many times and continues to monitor the technology and protocols for the implementation of a beneficial and practical testing program. An important factor to consider is the false sense of security provided by testing, as a test is a snapshot from a moment in time that passes as soon as the patient leaves the testing facility. Weighed against the energies and resources that would be allocated to an effective testing program, it is not deemed a priority protocol at this time.
- As with all of these health and safety protocols, they are subject to change with local conditions, new data, and medical advancements.

Working with our Medical Advisory Panel and Health and Safety Committee

BWS works with a group of three local family physicians, the **Medical Advisory Panel (MAP)** to guide its decisions on health and safety protocols. We are blessed with diverse expertise on the panel. Our doctors represent the lens of public health, front-line Covid response practices, and anthroposophical medicine. **Dr. Lara Setti, Dr. Jeremy Stoepker, and Dr. Joe Cooney**, current and graduated parents of BWS students, work together with the school to bring research and best health practice to the school context.

The Medical Advisory Panel has been an invaluable resource in navigating this pandemic. They allow us to not only be nimble in our response to Covid, but also deepen our understanding of the progression of the pandemic and the rationale for our protocols. They share their expertise with our families, faculty, and administration. In one case, they even spoke to our older students. We believe community education is a key factor in meeting this moment.

On campus, our **Health and Safety Committee** is coordinated by **Leslie Bissaillon**. She is your first point of contact for Covid related questions or concerns. In addition, **Kevin Crowley**, our games teacher and Athletic Director, sits on the Health and Safety Committee to ensure that our protocols are responsive for free play, organized play and athletic activities. **Eileen Markland**, our Music Director, sits on the committee to deepen our exploration of the research on singing and instrument play. Early Childhood teacher, **Charlotte Hoppe**, brings forth the questions and concerns of the early childhood program. They work collaboratively with the Medical Advisory Committee to balance research, policy and implementation.

We are incredibly fortunate for the hours, expertise and heart that all of these individuals bring to the effort.

Thank you for being a part of this community!

Your trust and commitment to our school propels us in this work. Part of this year's plan is to focus more energy on safely bringing families back to campus. This feels as much an important part of the plan for a healthy school as these protocols. We look forward to stepping into this next chapter together.

Please join us for the Health and Safety Town Hall on Sunday, August 29 at 7pm!