

December 5, 2022

Dear Colleagues:

In March 2022, the state ended the requirement for masks in schools as the Omicron COVID-19 surge [subsided](#). Since that time, schools across New York have successfully managed to return to in-person school operations, while navigating the continued threat of COVID-19.

The New York State Education Department and Department of Health continue our work to keep students, teachers, and staff safe through promotion of prevention measures, including the use of vaccines and bivalent boosters to reduce the impact of this virus.

Today, however, we face a newly complex challenge. A host of respiratory viruses, including influenza, RSV and COVID-19, have taken hold in our state and in most of our communities. These viruses, while often manageable, can cause serious outcomes, especially for children. They have been straining our healthcare system and are taxing the availability of pediatric beds across New York.

The number of laboratory-confirmed flu cases has nearly tripled over the past three weeks and flu hospitalizations have more than doubled. In addition, COVID-19 continues to pose a significant threat, particularly for unvaccinated or under-vaccinated New Yorkers, as the virus remains one of the leading causes of death in the United States.

In response, we are urging a community-wide approach, inclusive of schools, to again take precautions this holiday season and winter that can prevent the spread of respiratory viruses and protect young children, older individuals, and those with underlying health conditions.

Communities and schools should encourage these commonsense precautions to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses:

1. Staying up to date on vaccines, including Flu and COVID-19.

2. Washing your hands often with soap and hot water for at