



Rhode Island Chapter

INCORPORATED IN RHODE ISLAND

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



December 5, 2022

Dear School and District Leaders,

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) and the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (RIAAP) urge Pre K-12 school settings to **review absentee policies and reduce the frequency of requiring doctor's notes for return to school after illness**, in order to ease the burden on the both the healthcare system and families during this winter season.

Right now, healthcare systems across the state are overburdened by the recent increase in respiratory illness (e.g., RSV, flu, and COVID-19,) in addition to the preexisting challenges of workforce shortages and the mental health crisis. **Sick and injured children have reduced access to medical care when the system is overburdened.** Families and children face long waits in crowded emergency departments and challenges to access primary care appointments.

Meanwhile, doctor's notes are not needed for most respiratory illnesses in school-aged children:

- **RSV and flu:** Most children don't need to seek medical care or get tested for RSV and other common respiratory viruses. Most children recover on their own. Children should stay home if symptomatic and may return to school when fever-free (without fever reducing medication) for 24 hours and symptoms have improved to near normal.
- **COVID-19:** Most children don't need medical care for COVID-19. When symptoms develop, parents can test children at home using an antigen test. If positive, children should isolate at home and may return to school after 5 days. They should be fever-free for 24 hours and symptoms improved to near normal. They should mask for an additional 5 days (days 6-10). Find more COVID-19 information in the [Pre K-12 School Outbreak Response Playbook](#).
- At the doctor's discretion, **children with underlying medical conditions or who are experiencing severe illness may require additional medical care and follow up**. If children will be absent from school for an extended period, it's recommended to provide a doctor's note.
- **Children experiencing these [warning signs](#) should receive medical care right away:** fast breathing or trouble breathing, bluish lips or face, ribs pulling in with each breath, chest pain, severe muscle pain, dehydration, not alert or interacting when awake, seizures, fever above 104F, fever or cough that improve but then return or worsen, or worsening of chronic medical conditions.

Information about when to contact a physician or seek emergency medical attention can be found at health.ri.gov/rightplace.

Rhode Islanders should take basic prevention measures for infectious respiratory illnesses to help keep themselves, and their families, healthy and safe. Find more information about prevention and resources to share with parents and school staff in RIDOH's [Respiratory Viruses: Community Partner Toolkit](#).

If you have questions, please contact RIDOH at ridoh.covidk12questions@health.ri.gov or 401-222-8022.

Thank you,

RIDOH and RIAAP