



COUNTY COUNCIL FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

APPROVED

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

The County Council for Montgomery County, Maryland convened via video conference at 9:01 A.M. on Tuesday, January 4, 2022.

PRESENT

Councilmember Gabe Albornoz, President	Councilmember Evan Glass, Vice President
Councilmember Andrew Friedson	Councilmember Tom Hucker
Councilmember Will Jawando	Councilmember Sidney Katz
Councilmember Nancy Navarro	Councilmember Craig Rice
Councilmember Hans Riemer	

The President in the Chair.

COUNCIL SITTING AS BOARD OF HEALTH

A. **[Updates from County Government and Montgomery County Public Schools \(MCPS\) - Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and Health Planning](#)**

Participating in the discussion were Ms. McGuire, Senior Legislative Analyst; Dr. Bridgers, Acting Chief Health Officer, Mr. O'Donnell, Program Administrator, Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response, and Mr. Hodge, Acting Senior Administrator for School-based Health, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS); Dr. Stoddard, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer; Mr. D'Andrea, Chief of Staff, Office of the Superintendent, Ms. Dublinske, Coordinator, Student Welfare and Compliance; and Ms. Iszard, Coordinator, Student Health and Wellness, MCPS.

Received information from DHHS staff on the omicron variant, which is becoming the most common and is quickly spreading in the community with a test positivity rate of over 25% in the County. Mr. O'Donnell reviewed rates among school-age children, breakthrough cases, hospitalization rates, public health goals and strategies to promote vaccinations and increase testing capacity, reduce new infections and prevent serious illness and death;

and coordination efforts with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to establish mass testing sites in the County. DHHS is working with MCPS to manage and mitigate virus transmission, and with school partners to offer vaccine clinics for children.

Noted that 83% of County residents are fully vaccinated and are encouraged to receive a booster shot. Steps are being taken to meet the greater demand for testing in both the public and private sectors; information on testing opportunities is available on the County's website. Orders have been placed for over a million rapid test kits and when they are received, information on their distribution will be provided to the public. Mr. O'Donnell reviewed current isolation and quarantine guidance and noted that updated guidance on isolation and quarantine protocols from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is forthcoming for healthcare and long-term care facilities, congregate living and correctional facilities, and for schools and childcare facilities. The Department is working with Technology and Business Solutions (TEBS) to develop a self-reporting portal and will include instructions on how to properly use the test kits. He urged residents not to go to emergency rooms just to get a Covid test. Dr. Bridgers recommended residents obtain a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test if a rapid test comes back positive.

Dr. Stoddard stated there are significant staffing issues throughout County government impacting expansion of testing programs. He indicated that 196,000 rapid test kits are expected to be delivered today and an additional 150,000 delivered tomorrow, with the largest share to be provided to MCPS. He discussed the impact of Governor's announcement of a state of emergency, which allows certain resources to be made available for clinical and support staff, and for National Guard personnel to staff mass testing sites, when operational.

MCPS staff provided information on the number of positive cases as of January 3 (5,680 among students and staff), reviewed upgrades in data reporting, noted that daily case reports for each school site will be posted on the COVID-19 dashboard by 7:00 P.M. each school day and the dashboard will continue to be updated weekly including quarantine information and the daily number of new cases. Received information as announced by Dr. McKnight, Acting Superintendent of Schools, earlier today on when/if individual schools would transition to virtual learning. Schools will be classified into three categories based on the number of positive cases reported: green (less than 3%), yellow (3% to 4.99%) and red (5% or greater). MCPS central staff will work with DHHS to review related data to determine whether an entire school should shift to virtual learning for a 14-day period, or if less restrictive measures could be taken. Currently, 11 schools are in the red category and will transition to virtual learning.

Mr. Alborno acknowledged staff shortages impacting the public health system, noting the complexity of this issue at the federal, state, and local levels.

Mr. Hucker commented on feedback received from residents that DHHS and MCPS were not sufficiently prepared for the return to school, and on planning and communication issues. He expressed concern about the scarcity of test kits and expressed the view that MCPS should be responsible for distributing test kits to parents, and that contact tracing should be done by DHHS staff, not MCPS. He noted the concern about teacher staff shortages and requested information on the current number of vacant teaching positions. Asking why a negative Covid test is not required to attend school, as done in the District of Columbia, Dr. Stoddard responded that equity issues, including getting rapid tests to every student and the reporting of results, pose challenges.

Mr. Jawando requested information on the number of parents who have opted-in to allow in-school rapid testing of their children and expressed the view that the State should change the rule make it an opt-out system so that more children could be tested.

Mr. Friedson requested the Council be kept updated on the status of the new MCPS Health Officer position and Mr. D'Andrea noted that MCPS anticipates the position will be filled by early February. He encouraged DHHS to proactively reach out to childcare providers regarding availability of rapid tests, and suggested the website clearly state the differences between rapid and PCR tests. Residents can receive information by contacting the Call Center at 240-777-2982.

Mr. Rice noted that restrictions in place last year have been relaxed, leading to higher transmission rates. He received assurances that no Covid tests are wasted, and that the availability of rapid test will reduce the burden at PCR test sites. DHHS staff said residents should limit size of gatherings, continue to wear face coverings and practice frequent hand washing to help reduce transmission of the virus, and if symptomatic stay at home. Dr. Stoddard indicated that to help keep kids in school, upgrades in mask quality, ventilation and filtration, and outdoor lunch periods can help. Mr. D'Andrea stated that MCPS is in the process of procuring KN95 masks for staff and students.

Mr. Riemer commented on the need to increase efforts to encourage residents to get vaccinated and boosted; suggested the dashboard include more refined statistics, including information on the number of County residents hospitalized, the number of pediatric hospitalizations; and expressed the view that all County employees should be required to be vaccinated, that air purifiers should be supplied to every classroom, and the

dashboard should distinguish between community-based and school-based transmission of the virus. He commented on the need to expand vaccination programs and vaccination requirements for students in extracurricular activities. He noted the need to increase the number of substitute teachers to address staffing issues, and requested the Council be kept informed in any changes in quarantine recommendations from the CDC or MDH.

Ms. Navarro, acknowledging staffing shortages, suggested that a method should be determined to let the public know where shortages exist and that MCPS staff should proactively address ventilation issues at schools.

Mr. Katz received clarification on what the state of emergency means: it makes certain resources available for clinical and support staff, hospitals can modify bed to staffing ratios, allows those with recently expired licenses to work, and for placement of National Guard personnel at mass test sites, among other actions.

Mr. Glass received information that MCPS regularly collaborates with other school systems to learn of best practices. Noting that the MDH website was not working properly in December, he stressed the need to ensure backups are in place so that accurate, timely data is available so that decisions can be made accordingly.

B. Introduction - [Resolution to adopt a First Amended Board of Health Regulation to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and indoor mask guidance in Montgomery County](#)

Introduced the subject resolution.

Senior Legislative Attorney Drummer provided an overview of the Board of Health Regulation, which extends the mask mandate by rescinding the termination of the mask mandate when 85% of eligible County residents were vaccinated, as set forth in the previous regulation.

PUBLIC HEARING - [Resolution to adopt a First Amended Board of Health Regulation to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and indoor mask guidance in Montgomery County](#)

The public hearing was held and the record closed.

ACTION - [Resolution to adopt a First Amended Board of Health Regulation to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and indoor mask guidance in Montgomery County](#)

Mr. Albornoz acknowledged residents' frustration as the pandemic continues and said the Council will continue to do what it can to move the County forward. He noted that the Board of Health would meet again on January 25 to consider possible further action.

Supported without objection Mr. Friedson's motion to amend the resolution to include a termination date for the Board of Health Regulation of January 31, 2022, at 11:59 P.M. without any further action by the Board of Health.

Adopted **Resolution 19-1120**, approving the First Amended Board of Health Regulation to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and indoor mask guidance in Montgomery County, as amended.

Mr. Riemer made the motion and the resolution was adopted by a roll call vote:

YEAS: Friedson, Jawando, Riemer, Navarro, Rice, Katz, Hucker, Glass, Albornoz.

The meeting adjourned at 12:40 P.M.

This is a correct copy of Council action.



Selena Mendy Singleton, Esq.
Clerk of the Council