

Vt. student COVID guidance expected to ease workload for schools

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RUTLAND, Vt. (WCAX) - New guidance that started this week in Vermont schools is expected to lighten the load for nurses and school administrators as increasing numbers of students become infected with omicron.

The new guidance calls for students who are unvaccinated and have a positive COVID exposure to test for five consecutive days at home instead of at school. If the test is negative, they can go to class as usual. For kids who are vaccinated, it is recommended but not required that they test on days four and five after their possible exposure.

“This feels more like the teamwork we want to foster,” said Soph Hall, the school nurse at Miller’s Run School in Sheffield and also past president of the Vermont State School Nurses Association. She says by increasing parental involvement, she thinks schools will see more cooperation. “As long as we have the materials and we can hand them to the families, they really want their kids to be healthy.”

But receiving enough test kits remains an issue for some districts. Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union Superintendent Jeanne Collins says all kits they received at the end of last week are gone and if they do not get more by end of Tuesday - some, will students still have to quarantine.

Grand Isle Supervisory Union Superintendent Michael Clark says they received 100 ,10-pack test kits but that he was told by state health officials the boxes can’t be split. “We can get creative and use these tests for something like a drive-up testing that parents administer in our parking lot,” he said in an email.

In Fair Haven, Slate Valley Unified Union School District Superintendent Brooke Olsen-Farrell says they were told to expect a big shipment of tests on Tuesday. “We only received 128 antigen kits today, which will last less than a day. We have no idea when we will receive more,” she said in an email.

School nurses and administrators have been on the front lines of contact tracing this past year, but the new rules have schools alerting entire classrooms of a positive case, not individuals. Hall says that takes some of the pressure off of school officials. “I’m very excited to make this transition because it may mean we all get our weekends back and our evenings back. We haven’t seen that since, who knows when,” she said.

Hall says it is too soon to know what the shift will do to the daily workload but she is optimistic about getting back to some tasks. “The screenings that I haven’t been able to do, and spending time with students to do more health promotion that is more individualized, not just COVID,” she said.