

Dear SAU 70 Families,

In preparation for our holiday season we are receiving many questions about travel over the breaks, as well as corresponding questions regarding quarantining. We know that we all wish we had an opportunity to travel and be with family at this time; however, given the current rise in the number of cases of COVID-19 across the country, it is not prudent to do so at this time. Our commitment is to ensuring student and staff safety and keeping schools open for in-person instruction. As a result, we urge you to follow the recent recommendations put forth by the State of Vermont and the State of New Hampshire regarding both travel and holiday gatherings.

Vermont

The following information is based on guidance from Governor Phil Scott, the Vermont Department of Health, and the Agency of Education. **It is important to note that this information is subject to change and will be updated as needed.**

General Travel:

Vermonters and those working in or attending school in Vermont must adhere to the state's travel restrictions. **At this time, the state of Vermont has suspended its leisure travel map. There is now a mandatory quarantine for anyone returning or traveling to Vermont.** If you travel out of Vermont whether for a day trip or longer, you must quarantine in Vermont when you return for 14 days. If you haven't had any symptoms of COVID-19, you also have the option to seek a PCR test on or after Day 7 to end quarantine early with a negative result.

We realize that the travel restrictions between Vermont and our New Hampshire neighbors in the Upper Valley can be confusing and inconvenient. Per state of Vermont guidelines, Vermonters who live near a border and regularly travel to and from a neighboring state may make day trips to that state for work, health care, to commute to attend preK-12 school or college, and for other ESSENTIAL needs like groceries, medical care, picking up medication, or visitation for parental shared custody, without quarantining. When parental visitation is outside Vermont, there should not be non-essential travel within that county during the non-custodial parent visit. The quarantine exemption ONLY applies to the person under essential travel rules. It does not apply to anyone else who travels with you. Taking your children with you for these trips means that your children WILL need to quarantine because it is NOT essential for them to accompany you (unless your child is the patient seeking medical care or your child is traveling for parental shared custody visits).

Below are some essential travel examples which can help to clarify the travel protocol:

- Grocery shopping or picking up medication is covered as essential, but only for the adult doing the activity (not for children accompanying the adult);

- Medical appointments are essential, but only for the adult who is the patient (not for children going with the adult. NOTE: if the child is the patient, one adult can accompany the child to the appointment, and that is considered essential travel);
- Traveling to provide care to a family member (only the adult providing the care is covered as essential, not children/other family members who accompany the adult).

Some NON-essential examples are below, and travel for these reasons would require quarantine:

- Sports events and sports shopping;
- Holiday shopping;
- Home decor and clothing shopping;
- Visiting family/friends;
- Eating at restaurants
- Going to a gym
- Going to a salon or barber shop

Please note: The state of Vermont has just clarified with us that there is an approved way for Vermont residents to obtain goods from Upper Valley businesses in Grafton and Sullivan Counties (i.e. take-out food and non essential shopping items that have been ordered) without having to quarantine. The process for this would be for Vermonters to order the items via phone or online, paying for them the same way. They could then drive into Grafton or Sullivan County, open their trunk, remain in the car (except to open the trunk if needed, maintaining social distance if getting out to open the trunk), have the items placed into the trunk, and drive straight back to Vermont. There cannot be face to face interaction with employees of the businesses. Call places of business ahead of time and see if curbside pick up is something they currently offer or if they are willing to do so.

Holiday Travel:

We understand that the upcoming holiday season is a time when many of us would like to visit with family and friends from across the area and out of state. Unfortunately, this cannot safely be done during the current pandemic. Governor Scott announced a ban on inter-family gatherings. Multi-household gatherings - indoor or outdoor, in public or private spaces are now prohibited. People are urged to continue to follow the state's travel guidance. At this time, Vermonters are being asked to:

Avoid travel. If Vermonters do travel, they must complete a full 14 day quarantine upon their return to Vermont or they may get a COVID-19 PCR test after 7 days of quarantine and resume normal activity once they receive a negative result.

No inter-family or multi-household gatherings are allowed at this time.

If you are a Vermonter picking up a student from an out-of-state college, you and the student will need to quarantine when you come back to Vermont for 14 days. If you have not had symptoms of COVID-19, you have the option to get tested for COVID after 7 days and end your quarantine with a negative COVID PCR test result.

Health Commissioner Dr. Mark Levine urged people to avoid holiday travel:

“We know that social gatherings — often among trusted family and friends — are a driving force behind much of the virus’s spread right now nationwide,” Levine said Tuesday. “Adding the element of travel to the mix only makes it more risky.”

Please know that if you **live in Vermont and work in NH or Vermont, or if you live in New Hampshire and work in Vermont**, you will need to follow the Vermont travel guidelines. This means if you travel outside of Vermont, you must quarantine when you return. If you have not had any symptoms of COVID-19, you may seek a PCR test on or after Day 7 to end quarantine early with a negative result. Otherwise, you will need to quarantine for 14 days.

New Hampshire

Governor Sununu suggests: “I think it’s a small sacrifice to say we’re not going to travel. We’re not going to get involved in large groups. All the kids go to different schools. All the parents work, for the most part, in different locations. So that just adds that domino effect of risk that you’re bringing into play.”

We are well aware of the sacrifices we have already made in order to open and maintain our school and community safety, and sincerely hope that we can support each other as we continue to safeguard the health of our area.

That being said, we know that some essential travel may be necessary during our holiday breaks. Guidelines from the state of NH classify teachers as “essential workers,” meaning that isolation and quarantine will not be necessary if teachers travel outside of New England. However, SAU 70 will continue to be more stringent and require staff who have travelled outside of New England to follow general state guidelines.

Please know that if you **live in New Hampshire and work in New Hampshire**, you will need to follow the New Hampshire guidelines. This means if you travel outside of New England, you must quarantine for 14 days when you return. If you have not had any symptoms of COVID-19, you may seek a PCR test on or after Day 7 to end quarantine early with a negative result.

We hope this clarifies the situation regarding travel. Please avoid traveling for anything other than essential reasons. We must continue to do what we can to keep our schools and community safe.

We have also had several questions about rumors and speculation regarding a shift to remote instruction. While some districts have decided to implement periods of preemptive remote instruction following the holidays, we have decided to continue with our current model. We will constantly monitor the epidemiological data and use it to inform any instructional changes. So far, our staff and our families have worked diligently to keep our schools open. Even as a few cases have emerged, this collaboration has been really effective. In the face of overwhelmed contact tracing at the state level, our nurses, teachers, and administrators have been able to work closely with our public health experts to react swiftly and thoroughly to prevent the spread of the disease in our schools. Families have played their parts too, by sharing critical information with us as we've done our own contact tracing. It has been oddly rewarding to see how schools have done such an excellent job even as the pandemic has surged. The great majority of outbreaks and clusters have happened in large gatherings outside of school, especially when people have disregarded the precautions that are now routine inside our schools. We are hopeful that we can continue to act in a spirit of kindness and community, keep an eye on the data, and work together to keep our schools open.

Together, our community has navigated unprecedented challenges this fall, and created opportunities for the children in our community to rekindle their love for learning and grow in new directions; rediscover old friendships and create new ones; and develop flexibility, strength and resilience that will serve them in everything they do. In the midst of everything, we have much to be thankful for, including the families, staff, and administration of SAU70.

Along with the SAU70 Staff and Administration, the Board would like to wish you all a restful and restorative Thanksgiving vacation.