



To the
parents of
all
children required to attend
school in NRW in secondary
levels I and II

Yvonne Gebauer MdL

Letter from the Minister regarding lessons after the autumn break

Dear parents and guardians,

After what was a very difficult school year for you and for us in 2020/21, we are very happy that the current school year got off to such a good start after the summer holidays. Regular testing and observing the proven hygiene rules have made safe in-person teaching possible.

We want to build on this good start after the autumn break as well, so that your children can continue to experience school with their class every day in as normal and, above all, as safe a way as possible.

In order to make this possible, we have brought in several regulations, which I would like to inform you of here:

Testing at the start of school

For the safety of the children and families, tests will be carried out in all schools on the first school day after the autumn break, Monday 25 October 2021, for pupils who are not vaccinated or recovered. Alternatively, pupils may present proof of a negative official test taken no longer than 48 hours previously.

After this, the tests which have previously been carried out in the schools will continue until the start of the Christmas break.

We are taking several effective measures to ensure a safe start back to school for your children after the autumn break, too. However, we need your support to do this. I therefore ask you to have your children tested during the last days of the autumn break if they are not yet vaccinated – even if you have not been on holiday. Please use official tests (Bürgertests) to do this. This is a voluntary communal contribution to making the return to school on 25 October 2021 as safe as possible, and is in all our interests.

Testing during the autumn break

As regular school testing won't be taking place during the autumn break, pupils will also need proof of a negative test for all 3G events during the holidays – provided they are not vaccinated or recovered.

A comprehensive range of tests will be available for this outside of school during the holidays. Official tests (Bürgertests) have to be paid for as of 11 October 2021. However, this does not apply to children and young adults under the age of 18; tests will remain free of charge for them.

Many pupils will go on holiday with their families in Germany and abroad during the autumn break. In this case, all people over the age of 12 who are not vaccinated or recovered from COVID are required to take a COVID test upon their return to Germany. In certain regions abroad in particular, there is an increased risk of infection with the COVID-19 virus (virus variant areas). A test is required for anyone over the age of 12 returning from these areas, irrespective of whether they are vaccinated or recovered.

Mask requirement

In North Rhine-Westphalia, we are happy to see a steady increase in the number of pupils being vaccinated. This is already the case for teachers and other school staff. In view of this positive development and taking account of the infection rates, the federal state government plans to lift the requirement to wear a mask while seated during lessons at the start of the second week after the autumn break, that is to say as of 2 November 2021.

The requirement to wear a mask has already been lifted while outdoors on school grounds. As such, it will then only be necessary to wear a mask when moving around inside school buildings. Of course, pupils can continue to

wear a face mask if they so wish.

Vaccinations

The federal state government supports the vaccination of children and young adults in accordance with the recommendations of the Permanent Vaccination Commission (STIKO). As such, schools should support what are known as visiting vaccination programmes by the school authorities or Offices of Public Health (for example with mobile vaccination teams) wherever possible.

I would like to reiterate here just how important a COVID vaccination is. By getting vaccinated, children and young adults are protecting themselves and others. As such, please make use of the vaccination programmes that your school provides.

I would also like to stress that the school vaccination programmes are in no way intended to infringe on your rights as parents. Your child's participation in the vaccination programme remains a voluntary individual decision and will be respected as such by the school community.

School trips

As regards school and class trips, which are very important for social cooperation and the psychosocial development of the pupils, all schools have been free to plan and hold such trips since the beginning of the school year. Unlike in the past two school years, it can be assumed that these trips will be planned in schools taking pandemic conditions into consideration. Schools and parents must take precautions against possible risks themselves (for example by making appropriate arrangements with organisers or taking out cancellation insurance). This particularly applies for the possible cancellation of trips as a result of infection.

“Settle in and catch up”

In order to close any gaps in learning which may have opened up during the pandemic, the federal state government – with the support of the federal government – will be providing schools in North Rhine-Westphalia with a total of around 430 million euros up until the end of 2022. Various sets of activities within the “Settle in and catch up” programme will address the different needs of all pupils, for example by providing additional staff during lessons and by offering free extracurricular activities.

The “Settle in and catch up” programme is being consistently implemented by schools, school authorities, and other responsible parties and is well received by pupils. It makes an important contribution to supporting all pupils – with and without the need for special educational support – in overcoming the gaps in their learning caused by the pandemic and to strengthening the school as a learning and living space.

Please enquire at your school about the many different activities, for example support measures in small groups, support activities outside of regular lessons, or individual support offerings, and encourage your child to take part in the activities.

Let me sincerely thank you again at this point for the important contribution you are making to help these activities succeed with your support. The fact that safe in-person teaching is able to take place at our schools is due in no small part to the great dedication displayed by you and especially your children and their teachers. The committed and responsible behaviour exhibited by children and young adults in this exceptional situation is really fantastic. I am very thankful to you all for this. The most important thing to me is that your children have a safe and untroubled school routine and achieve their educational goals despite the pandemic. We will continue to do all we can to achieve this.

Dear parents and guardians,

We know that vaccination is the best protection for us all. I therefore urge you to get vaccinated. For your own protection as well as that of our children and young adults. Your children have made a tremendous contribution to protecting adults over the past months. Now it's time to give them the best possible protection with their own vaccination.

I wish you and your children a good and healthy start back to school on 25 October 2021.

Best regards,



Yvonne Gebauer