

**School Superintendents
Key Messages Week of 8/2/2021, Subject to Change**

COVID-19 PREVENTION STRATEGIES IN SCHOOLS

CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Children should return to full-time in-person learning in the fall with **layered prevention strategies** in place.

The top priority is to ensure that all children have access to in-person instruction this year in a manner that **prioritizes the health and safety** of the students, teachers, school staff, their families, and the community.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19, keeping children healthy, and meeting their educational and social needs are **not mutually exclusive goals**.

To ensure the health and safety of students, staff, and the community, DCHD strongly recommends that **schools adopt a policy to require universal indoor masking regardless of vaccination status**, in addition to having all evidenced-based prevention strategies in place at the start of the school year.

Universal indoor masking should continue in schools until all school-aged children are eligible for the vaccine and recommendations from CDC and IDPH are updated.

We recognize school districts have the ultimate authority and discretion to develop plans to return to school and to ensure a safe school environment for all students and staff.

As we all work together to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our students, staff, and community, we must continue to protect ourselves and one another from the serious effects of COVID-19 disease. Our collective goal is to bring an end to this pandemic!

We know what works to mitigate COVID-19 spread: vaccination and masking. If we don't or can't have vaccination (e.g., students under 12 years not yet eligible, less than 50 percent of 12-17 year old students are vaccinated to date), and if masking is "optional" (which is how COVID-19 spreads, with unvaccinated people within 6 feet who aren't masked for prolonged periods), we will have unmitigated spread, leading to increased infection and exposures, leading to increased quarantine and absenteeism, possibly leading to school closure. This would be a failure to achieve our **collective goal of safe, successful reopening with full in-person learning**. We can prevent this failure by beginning the school year with all mitigation measures implemented, especially universal indoor masking and COVID-19 vaccination.

Risk of COVID-19-related hospitalization and death is lower in children than adults; the risk is low, but not zero.

- If we have simple, safe, and highly effective measures (e.g., universal indoor masking, vaccinating all eligible persons) which can prevent pediatric hospitalizations and deaths, we should implement them. We're fortunate we haven't experienced any COVID-19 pediatric deaths in DuPage County to date and may we never. **No number of pediatric deaths is acceptable, for any family or community.**
- The risk of severe illness and death is low, but infected children and adolescents are **efficient at spreading COVID-19 in households, schools, and communities to adults who are at greater risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death**. These are preventable with simple and effective measures that need to be implemented until COVID-19 activity levels decrease to lower levels for sustained periods and until vaccine eligibility is expanded.