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**Johnson County Public Health Officials Share School Gating Criteria Update and Guidance with Johnson County Superintendents**

(JOHNSON COUNTY, KAN) August 18, 2020 – Johnson County public health officials and school district leaders met today to review the most recent science and data regarding the spread of COVID-19 infections within the county. School districts will use this information as a guideline to make decisions for each of their districts regarding the safest learning mode to begin the 2020-2021 school year.

At the request of the six Johnson County public school district superintendents (Blue Valley, De Soto, Gardner Edgerton, Olathe, Shawnee Mission and Spring Hill) and in consultation with them, the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment (JCDHE) developed public health gating criteria for reopening schools that were science-based and data driven.

The six superintendents are all in agreement that the requested criteria is intended to help them reduce and manage risks to district families, teachers, staff and the community as a whole during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Public health officials recently communicated that the number of new COVID-19 cases and the percentage of tests that are positive in our community are increasing.

The data shared in today's meeting with superintendents included:

- **Case counts** - In the last 14 days, newly reported cases in Johnson County have increased. The county averaged 106 cases per day last week (total of 740 new infections) and 90 cases per day the preceding two weeks (total of 629 and 627 new infections respectively). These are very high numbers.

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- **Percentage of positive cases per population** – Current percent of positive cases can be found on the Gating Criteria tab at the Johnson County COVID-19 [Dashboard](#). At the request of the community, JCDHE has included additional ways of looking at the gating criteria data, including the rate of new cases per 100,000 in population over a 7-day period and weekly number of new infections. The 740 new infections from last week represents 120 cases per 100,000 residents while the 629 new infections from the previous week represents 102 new cases per 100,000 residents.
- Consistent with the gating criteria released earlier and based on the number of new infections and the trajectory of positivity rate, Johnson County is in the Red zone. More information on that is available at <https://www.jocogov.org/school-reopening-criteria>
- A number of public health considerations factored into the recommendations for elementary students:
  - Young children have the largest educational benefits to gain by being in school.
  - Most young children are unable to stay home safely by themselves.
  - Elementary schools are better able to cohort (or group) children to prevent multiple exposures throughout the day.
  - In person does not mean “business as usual”; elementary schools will institute universal masking, hand hygiene, and social distancing to prevent transmission.

Individual school districts will use today’s guidance to determine the safest learning mode to start the upcoming school year.

As new evidence emerges, recommendations may change. JCDHE and school districts will continue to work closely together to monitor community and school conditions and make amendments as necessary.

“The spread of the virus is still increasing in Johnson County. The risk of exposure to the virus is low in schools when community transmission is low,” said Dr. Areola.

“Unfortunately, we have not met the threshold in the school gating criteria for a safe return to in-person learning, even for a hybrid model.”

JCDHE stressed that while this is the current state of the data, it is possible for circumstances to change, if people are willing to make it happen.

“We ask that all of us as community continue to work hard collectively to control the virus,” said Dr. Areola.

County health officials urged residents to continue social distancing, avoid large crowds, stay away from house parties and wear masks.

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## **Background information**

JCDHE released school gating criteria for K-12 schools on July 28 to help families and school districts make decisions about the reopening of schools in Johnson County in the safest way possible. They outlined recommendations for learning modes and extracurricular activities, based on public health data about the community transmission of COVID-19.

The recommendations are based on currently available information, data and science as well as expert analysis from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Children's Mercy Hospital. JCDHE developed the gating criteria in consultation with the school districts per their request. It has been adopted for use in other Kansas counties including Sedgwick and Riley counties.

The gating criteria include two specific data points: the percent of positive tests and the trend in the number of new cases (steady, increasing or decreasing). If the gating criteria relied on infection rate by population, the result would still be the same.

The recommendations can be found at [www.jocogov.org/coronavirus](http://www.jocogov.org/coronavirus). The gating criteria are updated daily.

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