

**JOHNSON COUNTY**  
KANSAS  
**Health & Environment**

July 16, 2021

Dear Superintendents and School Board Members,

JCDHE is pleased to provide updated guidance for the prevention and control of COVID-19 for K-12 schools for the 2021-2022 academic year. Working in partnership with you, our shared, primary goal remains to keep schools open so that our children can learn and benefit from interactions with others. We recognize that in-person learning is best and are committed to working with you to promote and maintain safe and healthy school environments.

To accomplish our shared goal, this guidance includes a multi-layered approach with four primary evidence-based mitigation strategies: (1) promote vaccination; (2) require indoor mask wearing among those who are not fully vaccinated; (3) exclude persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection; and (4) exclude close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases. These strategies are consistent with the recently updated K-12 school guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>1</sup>

Vaccination efforts have been successful. The CDC recently issued guidance enabling most people who have been fully vaccinated to resume activities they did prior to the pandemic. However, substantial risks remain to those who are not fully vaccinated, including children under age 12 years for whom there is no currently authorized vaccine. The highly transmissible Delta variant is now the dominant strain in Johnson County, resulting in an increase in new cases and numerous outbreaks associated with summer camps and school-age programs. Currently authorized vaccines are highly effective at preventing COVID-19 transmission and severe illness, including against the Delta variant. However, less than 40% of children aged 12-17 years in Johnson County have been fully vaccinated. **JCDHE urges you to strongly promote vaccination among your eligible students, faculty and staff.**

Wearing masks is a critical element of student and staff safety in school buildings. Analysis of data from the 2020-2021 school year demonstrates the effectiveness of mask wearing, including during full, in-person learning. Among masked classmates who were within three feet of a positive individual, less than 1% were infected. If masking policies are applied consistently, the risks to close contacts are low and contact tracing will not be needed unless transmission within a class is identified. Therefore, **JCDHE also recommends that school boards implement a policy that requires indoor mask wearing among persons who are not fully vaccinated.**

Any person, including student, faculty or staff member, diagnosed with COVID-19 infection must be excluded from school for the appropriate period of isolation. Per K.S.A. 65-122, school principals and other persons in charge have a duty to exclude persons affected with a disease suspected of being infectious or contagious.<sup>2</sup> This includes the person under investigation for COVID-19 until they are determined to be uninfected. Kansas Department of Health and Environment has offered a daily testing strategy to allow exposed students to remain in school. JCDHE will work with school districts to implement this testing strategy. Despite the continued challenges of this pandemic, we look forward to the day that these mitigation measures are no longer necessary. As parents ourselves, we understand the value of a healthy learning environment for our students. Students, families, school districts and the community must continue to work together to prevent transmission within our schools and protect the health of the community.

Sincerely,



Sanmi Areola, Ph.D., Director



Joseph LeMaster, M.D., Local Health Officer

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

<sup>2</sup> Kan. Stat. Ann. § 65-122 (1976). [https://www.ksrevisor.org/statutes/chapters/ch65/065\\_001\\_0022.html](https://www.ksrevisor.org/statutes/chapters/ch65/065_001_0022.html)