

Knox Public Health COVID-19 Update August 5th, 2021

The COVID pandemic is different from last year. The COVID delta variant is currently the predominant strain in Ohio. The delta variant is 50% more contagious than the alpha variant, which is itself 50% more contagious than the original COVID virus from early 2020.

COVID vaccines and masks work. It is clear the evidence supporting the effectiveness of vaccines and masks is overwhelming. That debate is over. While other protective actions such as distancing, ventilation, and regular cleaning are important, they all pale in comparison to the impact vaccines and masks can have to prevent disease. COVID vaccines represent a superb advancement in modern medicine. Knox Public Health (KPH) is proud to offer safe and effective COVID vaccine to anyone who is eligible to receive it.

Recommendation for K-12 Schools

Knox Public Health (KPH) strongly urges schools to adopt all of the CDC, AAP, and the Ohio Department of Health recommendations for schools this year including universal masking.

KPH strongly believes that masks are the non-negotiable prevention strategy school leaders must require now. Masks are a proven method to limit transmission of COVID and, besides vaccine, are the best tools to keep everyone in school as much as possible. Until vaccine becomes available to all school-age students, the need to protect our most vulnerable population has never been greater. In Knox County, less than 31% of **eligible** school-aged children are vaccinated (12-19 years of age). When vaccine becomes available to those age 11 and younger, KPH will offer to conduct vaccine clinics at the schools in addition to our operations at our office. Masks reduced transmission and helped keep students in school last year. Masks, combined with distancing of at least three feet, permit students who are exposed to someone who tests positive for COVID to continue to attend school (to “break quarantine”). Ideally all students and staff in schools should wear a mask regardless of vaccination status as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Masks work best when everyone wears them.

Knox Public Health is grounded in data, studies, and policies but viewed through the lens of practical implementation and acceptance in our county. The focus of this document is centered around current knowledge of:

- Vaccine effectiveness in the reduction of COVID cases, severe illness, and spread.
- Vaccine performance against emerging variant strains of COVID.
- Vaccine availability to school-age students.
- School-age and overall population vaccination rates.
- Attitudes and behaviors towards vaccination and prevention measures.

- Necessity of prevention measures in the context of community transmission rates and communicability/severity of circulating variants of COVID.
- Overall COVID case incidence rates and trends.

Promote vaccination among all staff and age-eligible students. School-based vaccine clinics are available upon request throughout the year. Fully vaccinated people do not have to quarantine following an exposure to a positive case as long as the exposed person remains symptom-free.

ADDITIONAL Mask Information

Masks must be worn over the nose, mouth, and chin. Students who may be exempted from a mask are those who 1) have a significant behavioral/psychological issue undergoing treatment that is exacerbated specifically using a facial covering (i.e., severe anxiety or a tactile aversion), 2) are living with severe autism or with extreme developmental delay who may become agitated or anxious wearing a mask, and 3) have a facial deformity that causes airway obstruction. When possible, students who are exempted from a mask should wear a clear face shield. Facial coverings may be removed for eating during school-designated breakfast and lunch times (or snack time for elementary students) and briefly to get a drink of water. Mask breaks occurring in the classroom or on a bus will nullify “Breaking Quarantine” guidelines outlined by the Ohio Department of Health. Provide education to staff and students on 1) how to properly wear coverings, 2) not touch coverings while they are on, 3) how to clean or sanitize your hands after touching the covering, 4) how to properly remove a facial covering, and 5) how to properly put a facial covering back on. *(consider explaining to elementary students to remove their face covering if they have to vomit)*

Intervention specialists, title teachers, speech teachers, pre-k through third grade teachers, teachers with a documented medical hearing issue, and all their associated students should wear a mask if they are in an identified mask groups above; however, a clear face shield may be used in lieu of a mask only during times of instruction when the observation of mouth features and movement are needed.



ADDITIONAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Physical Distancing	Maintain as much distance between students and staff as physical infrastructure will allow. Physical distancing is not as critical when masking is implemented. Three feet of distance between students, <u>combined with masks</u> , is required to permit exposed students to “break quarantine” to attend school.
Ventilation & Air Flow	Within the scope of and compliance with school safety plans, mix as much outside air into buildings and buses (i.e., open doors and windows) while working to maintain a reasonably comfortable indoor environment. Within system design capabilities, set HVAC systems to bring in the maximum amount of outside air. Actively work to improve central air filtration by increasing air filtration to as high as possible (MERV 13 or 14). Operate ventilation systems and exhaust fans continuously 24 hours a day, 7 days a week whenever possible.
Symptoms & Testing	Staff and students should check themselves for all COVID symptoms each day before coming to school. Staff or students should not enter school if they 1) have a symptom of COVID (especially those who are unvaccinated), 2) have a household member that is a confirmed case, or 3) are themselves quarantined as a contact of a case who has tested positive for COVID. Students who develop symptoms at school should wear a surgical mask, be separated from other students, and be picked up within 1 hour of notification to the parent or guardian. Anyone who experiences symptoms of COVID should immediately seek testing from a healthcare provider or through a proctored, verifiable at-home test kit.
Cleaning & Disinfection	Clean and disinfect surfaces at least once a day. If a school has had a sick person or someone who tests positive for COVID, deep clean and disinfect the spaces the person occupied within the last 24 hours.
Hand Hygiene & Respiratory Etiquette	Teach and reinforce handwashing and respiratory etiquette (covering all coughs and sneezes) to keep from spreading infectious illnesses such as COVID. Provide hand sanitizer in all rooms and in high-touch and high-flow areas.
Contact Tracing	Maintain lists of students and seating arrangements in classrooms and lunchrooms. Encourage small pods wherever possible. Work with KPH to identify students and staff who may have been in close contact with a positive case.
Higher Risk Activities: Meals, Music, Sports, Theater, Drama, Physical Education, & Assemblies	Conduct higher risk activities such as eating, music/choir/band, sports, theater and drama practice, physical education, and gatherings/assemblies outdoors whenever weather permits. When indoors, use the largest room possible and mix in the greatest amount of outside air as feasible. Use bell covers, instrument socks, and wear multi-layer masks for indoor music/choir/band. Physical distancing of at least 6 feet between members of different households should be maintained whenever possible during higher risk activities.

