



News Release

Unified Government of Wyandotte County
701 N. 7th Street, Room 620
Kansas City, Kansas 66101

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 28, 2021

Unified Government Public Health Department Issues COVID-19 Guidance for the Upcoming 2021-2022 School Year in Wyandotte County

In response to a surge of COVID-19 cases throughout the Kansas City metro, and the increasing presence of cases caused by the Delta variant in Wyandotte County, the Unified Government Public Health Department has issued a letter outlining COVID-19 guidance for the 2021-2022 school year to Wyandotte County school superintendents and school board members.

“We are currently averaging 58 new COVID-19 cases per day in Wyandotte County, compared to only 10 new cases per day one month ago,” said Dr. Allen Greiner, Chief Medical Officer for the Unified Government Public Health Department. “In addition to this, we have found that 100 percent of the COVID-19 cases we have sequenced since July 1st have been caused by the Delta variant. Because this variant spreads much more easily than other COVID-19 variants, this is especially troubling information to have just as we are preparing to send children back to school.”

The objective of the letter, according to Greiner and other UGPHD leaders, was to give school superintendents and school board members recommendations that would help keep students and staff as safe as possible in an “in-person” learning environment.

Under current law, neither the Unified Government Public Health Department or the Unified Government commissioners have the ability to mandate any policies regarding COVID-19 for school districts. That authority rests with the school boards of each school district.

The UGPHD recommendations are based predominantly on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention” document (see link in “Resources” section at the end of this document). That document outlines seven prevention strategies essential to safe, in-person learning, using a “layered” approach. According to the CDC, a layered approach is critical for school

mitigation and layered strategies implemented at the same time provide the greatest level of COVID-19 protection for students and staff.

The recommendations outlined in the letter include:

1. **Universal and correct use of masks.** Masks are shown to significantly reduce the spread of COVID-19 in indoor settings. A universal mask policy for all students and staff sets the expectation that people will use masks throughout the school. Masks should be required in all classroom and non-classroom settings, including hallways, restrooms, gyms, busses and offices. This recommendation is not only supported by the CDC and the UGPHD, but also by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).
2. **Physical distancing.** Establish school policies and implement structural interventions to promote physical distancing between people. Efforts should be made to physically distance students at least 3 feet apart in classroom settings. During higher risk activities such as singing, shouting, band or athletics, at least 6 feet of distance should be maintained.
3. **Diagnostic and screening testing.** We recommend that schools offer diagnostic testing for any students or staff exhibiting symptoms of COVID. The UGPHD can offer assistance in implementing testing. We also recommend that schools utilize screening testing based on community transmission. Further guidance on testing can be found in the CDC guidance.
4. **Vaccination, when applicable.** COVID-19 vaccination is available for all students and staff 12 years of age and older. More information on vaccination sites and events can be found at wycovaccines.org. Please reach out if you would like to coordinate a vaccination event for your school district.
5. **Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine.** Students and staff with a positive test result should isolate at home for 10 days after their symptoms begin, or 10 days from their positive test if no symptoms are present. Unvaccinated close contacts of a positive case—defined as within 6 feet for 10 minutes or longer—should quarantine at home for 14 days from their last date of exposure. Any students or staff with symptoms of COVID should stay home and seek testing before returning to schools. For additional details, please consult the UGPHD for assistance.
6. **Handwashing and respiratory etiquette.** The basic principles of proper handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes should be emphasized among students and staff. Provide adequate supplies such as soap, hand sanitizer, tissues, and trash cans in classrooms.
7. **Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities.** Make changes to physical spaces to maintain a healthy environment and facilities, including improving ventilation. Routinely clean high-touch surfaces, such as doorknobs and light switches.

“One of our chief concerns is that many of the students returning to schools this year are under 12 years of age and therefore can’t be vaccinated against COVID-19,” explained

Juliann Van Liew, Director of the Unified Government Public Health Department. “We are determined to work with school district leaders throughout Wyandotte County to protect these students from exposure to the virus. First and foremost, the best way to protect a child who can’t be vaccinated is to make sure everyone around those children who is old enough to be vaccinated gets their free COVID-19 vaccination. It’s equally important that everyone in the child’s environment, including these children, wear a mask.”

Free COVID-19 vaccines are still available for people who live in Wyandotte County age 12 and older, at the former Kmart site at 7836 State Avenue. Hours for COVID-19 vaccinations and testing, and childhood immunizations in July are as follows (NOTE: All of these services are free of charge!):

- COVID Testing: Monday – Tuesday 9 am – 3 pm and Wednesday – Friday 9 am – 6 pm.
- COVID Vaccines: Wednesday – Friday 10 am – 6 pm.
- Childhood Immunizations: Wednesday 12 pm – 6 pm

For more information on where to get vaccinated in Wyandotte County, visit WycoVaccines.org or call 3-1-1. To learn more about upcoming UGPHD mobile vaccination events visit their Facebook page at facebook.com/UGHealthDept

Media Inquiries: Sally Behringer
Public Relations Account Director, ModOp
Cell: (785) 218-9759
Sally.behringer@modop.com

Community Information and Questions:

Vaccine information: Go to WycoVaccines.org or call 3-1-1 (913-573-5311)

Other COVID-19 updates: Go to wycokck.org/COVID-19

Resources:

For your convenience, here are links to some additional resources that were referenced in the UGPHD letter to school superintendents and school board members:

COVID-19 School Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

Guidance from Children’s Mercy Hospital:

<https://www.childrensmercy.org/siteassets/media/covid-19/guidance-for-school-re-opening-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.pdf>

---end---