



Unified Government Public Health Department

To:

Wyandotte County Schools Leadership and Staff
Wyandotte County District Superintendents
Directors of Wyandotte County Community-based Club Sports and Activities

From:

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Erin Corriveau, MD, MPH, Deputy Health Officer, UG Public Health Department
Elizabeth Groenweghe, MPH, Chief Epidemiologist, UG Public Health Department

We greatly appreciate the tremendous work you and your staff have put in to ensure that our children are safe in school during this pandemic.

The extremely high level of community spread in the county increases the risk of introduction of the COVID-19 virus into our school buildings. As you know, we have had infections in our schools. But, we have worked with you to reduce the risk of further transmissions when infections are introduced in schools and prevented large outbreaks, thus far. This has been largely achieved by taking steps to limit secondary transmission to the fewest number of people. You have put forth tremendous effort in cohorting students, continuous mask wearing and also mixed in-person and remote learning or remotizing learning only learning environments.

Given the dire number of COVID-19 infections we have seen over the past few days, we will need to do even more to mitigate viral spread as we head into fall and winter. As you know, the cooler seasonal temperatures will mean outdoor activities become less of an option and indoor activities increase. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, spreads even more easily in indoor environments. In the coming months, we expect to see an even bigger increase in the number of our residents infected with the virus due to indoor gatherings related to holidays, etc.

One place where we have the best chance to control the increased spread of the virus, is within our schools. The UG Public Health Department has consistently stressed that the overarching goal is to protect the health and well-being of students, teachers, school staff and families by carefully considering all risks and weighing them against the benefits of social interactions and learning modes. As you know, the risk of infections is higher with any amount of in-person learning. Unfortunately, athletics and extracurricular activities increase the risk even more because of excessive exhalation, close physical contact, and inconsistent mask wearing.

The UG Public Health Department strongly advised against close contact activities during the summer months. Despite our recommendations, we quarantined many students involved in close contact activities. Now, as we approach the winter months, we fear the risk of transmission of the virus will be significantly higher during this period, given most activities will be driven indoors due to weather.

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Therefore, the UG Public Health Department strongly recommends that you do not allow indoor sports or activities such as basketball or wrestling, based upon the level of community transmission and consequently, the risks involved. The chances of widespread transmission in schools is higher if these indoor activities are performed, especially when spectators are allowed.

If you decide against this recommendation, it is important to take adequate risk reduction precautions, including carefully cohorting participating students, quickly identify infections, limiting spectator attendance to immediate family members only, and monitoring symptoms.

The UG Public Health Department will continue to work with you to prevent transmission of the virus and respond as necessary. Our efforts continue to depend on proper mask-wearing, cohorting students, careful social distancing within our schools at all times and public education. We also rely on community members to follow mask-wearing guidelines, social distancing and avoiding groups outside from their immediate household.

Thank you for all you do in your efforts to keep Wyandotte children and their families safe,

Juliann VanLiew, MPH, Director, UG Public Health Department

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