



Fond du Lac County Health Department

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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**Fond du Lac County
Health Department**

August 30, 2021

Dear Fond du Lac County School District Superintendents and School Boards,

As we prepare for the return of school, we are currently seeing an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases as well as hospitalizations in the county. The rapid spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19 brings heightened concern. COVID-19 cases are up in Wisconsin and we do not want to see hospital ICUs reach capacity locally.

In anticipation of a surge in new cases and hospitalizations, I **respectfully request** all students, staff and visitors wear masks in indoor school settings for the return to school this fall to mitigate further spread of the virus, including the Delta variant. We applaud our area schools for their mitigation strategies and working together to help our students get the best experience possible for in-person learning.

To date, 90% (18 of 20) of COVID-19 hospitalizations among county residents ages 0-18 have occurred since April this year, which marks the start of the circulation of the Delta variant in Wisconsin.

- The Delta variant is highly contagious, more than 2x as contagious as previous variants.
- **Some data suggest the Delta variant might cause more severe illness than previous strains in unvaccinated persons.** In two different studies from Canada and Scotland, patients infected with the Delta variant were more likely to be hospitalized than patients infected with Alpha or the original virus strains. Children are more susceptible to the Delta variant than the previous COVID-19 virus variants.

Impact on COVID-19 in local hospitals

- Within the past several weeks, all three Agnesian HealthCare hospitals have experienced a significant increase (nearly 80%) in the number of hospitalized patients, most of which are unvaccinated. At the same time, emergency and urgent care services have also seen an increase of positive COVID-19 cases in both vaccinated and unvaccinated patients, including a heightened number of children under 17.
- The numbers of hospitalized patients are easily approaching the surge of COVID-19 cases experienced in fall 2020. This leads to difficult decisions on continuing elective procedures, bed capacity concerns and much more.
- A noticeable increase in COVID-19 positive patients is also coming at a time where health care providers across the nation, within the state and locally are facing worker shortages.
- As health care professionals, we understand that kids need to be in school for the sake of their mental health and to avoid learning losses. However, that option becomes more dangerous without mask-wearing since more children would miss school if they're exposed to COVID-19 or get sick from it. At this time, anyone age 11 or below can't be vaccinated which increases their risk.
- Children can spread the virus to other family members who may or may not be vaccinated.
- Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Agnesian HealthCare, like other health care providers, have been following guidance from trusted medical organizations. Agencies including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Pediatrics Association both recommend universal mask-wearing in schools.

To keep schools as safe as possible, I **respectfully request** all students, staff and visitors in schools practice mask-wearing indoors with the exception of masking during active participation in an athletic event. It should be in all of our interest to minimize disease spread, which means masking in indoor school settings regardless of vaccination status. In addition, we underscore the importance of following the [DHS Guidelines for the Prevention, Investigation, and Control of COVID-19 Outbreaks in K-12 Schools](#). The [CDC Data Tracker](#) is another tool available to identify when mask-wearing is recommended in public indoor settings at the county level.

We ask each district and school to monitor the beginning of school and COVID-19 spread, and to adjust practices as needed to help keep our schools open and kids safe. This means some schools may have to move to universal masking if necessary to slow the spread, where others may not. Individual school exposures and data are the most important statistics in driving change in mitigation strategies. If necessary, the Health Department would consider a mask mandate to keep our citizens safe and healthcare systems from being overwhelmed. At this time, we will not issue a universal mask mandate, but could consider it in the future if necessary on a school by school basis.

The Health Department is committed to working with our local school district and we appreciate your leadership during this challenging time. We plan to continue meeting with schools on regular basis to provide the latest data and recommendations to help guide decision making. This request comes in a concerted effort to lessen spread to keep schools open for in-person learning and students and staff safe.

Thank you,



Kimberly Mueller
Health Officer

With the support of:

Katherine Vergos, St. Agnes Hospital President

DeAnn Thurmer, Ripon Medical Center/Waupun Memorial Hospital President