



Date: 1-28-2022

Dear Superintendents,

Currently, COVID-19 vaccinations are readily available and accessible to all school age children and adults. COVID-19 vaccines, coupled with layered intervention strategies continue to be critical components to limiting the spread of this virus. These mitigation strategies, individually or collectively, do not prevent COVID—19 transmission by 100%; they do provide the best defense practices and include, but are not limited to:

- Frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer whenever possible
- Isolate at home when diagnosed with COVID-19
- Quarantine when exposed to a person with COVID-19 outside of the school setting
- Social distance in indoor settings when around others outside of your family circle
- Remain at home when exhibiting signs of COVID-19
- Thorough cleaning and disinfection of all school, work, and home environments on a routine basis
- Following the Ohio Department of Health guidelines for “Mask to Stay” “Test to Play” when a person is identified as a close contact to a person with COVID in the school or outside the school setting.

Masking:

Although the Lake County General Health District (LCGHD) and Geauga Public Health (GPH) recommend the use of all prevention strategies, the representatives of these agencies also understand the desire of parents and members of the community to make the wearing of masks and facial coverings an individual choice.

Currently vaccines are highly effective and readily available, the wide variance in proper masking use and care, low conversion rate of quarantined students (less than 4%), and broad testing access; the LCGHD and the GPH can now recommend masks be optional. At the time this correspondence the rate of new cases 10:1000 or 1% of the population and lower rate for school aged children and holiday surge is behind us. Both physical and mental health must remain balanced.

Contact Tracing and Reporting:

- Schools may discontinue universal contact tracing but are expected to assist LCGHD/GPH with contact tracing, case investigation and exposure notification related to outbreaks or clusters in schools as determined by the health district. K-12 schools should continue to follow ODH’s protocol, “Mask to Stay, Test to Play,” and allow asymptomatic students to attend school while wearing a mask if they have been exposed to someone with ***COVID-19 FOR BOTH COMMUNITY OR CLASSROOM EXPOSURES.***
- The school positive case reporting cadence has been changed to weekly. Schools should report positive student and staff cases to the health district by close of business on Fridays. The notification within 24 hours of a positive case to the health district is no longer required. Notification to the parents can still be done via a website dashboard.
- During this transition away from universal contact tracing LCGHD continues to recommend mitigation strategies that schools have previously adopted such as cleaning, disinfecting and distancing.

In-person instruction continues to be the goal of all local school districts and the Lake and Geauga County Health Departments fully support that goal. The health and safety of the citizens of Lake and Geauga County are of the utmost importance and if the incidence of COVID-19 in schools rises to a level that threatens the safety of students or the ability of your students to attend in-person classes, policies will be re-evaluated, and all mitigation strategies will be re-examined to make necessary changes to support the safety and well-being of all. As always, it is recommended that Boards of Education consult with legal counsel prior to making changes to their COVID-19 mitigation strategies.

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