

To: Board of County Commissioners
Penny Postoak Ferguson, County Manager

From: Joe Connor, Assistant County Manager
Dr. Sanmi Areola, Public Health Director
Dr. Joe LeMaster, Local Health Officer

Date: August 5, 2021

Re: Proposed Health Order No. 001-21 – Elementary Schools

Issue: Proposed Health Order No. 001-21 – Elementary Schools

Suggested Motion: I move to adopt Health Order No. 001-21 thereby establishing Public Health recommendations to slow and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in Johnson County, Kansas.

Background: The Board of County Commissioners on March 25, 2021, passed a public health order extending until April 30, 2021 the wearing of masks and social distancing requirements for individuals and businesses within Johnson County. Community health goals related to decisions regarding continuing the public health order were adopted by the BOCC that included a primary goal of the vaccination rate of 50% of eligible residents receiving at least one dose and secondary goals of a percent positivity rate of less than 5% and the incidence rate per 100,000 of less than 50. Since that time the highly infectious Delta variant has emerged as the dominant strain throughout the U.S., causing surges throughout the U.S., including in Johnson County.

The Delta variant was initially identified in India in December 2020 and was first detected in the U.S. in March 2021. As reported widely in the news media, an internal document from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated that the Delta variant is as contagious as chickenpox. And although persons who are fully vaccinated rarely get serious infections, evidence is emerging that they can become infected and transmit the virus to others.

Considering this new evidence on the Delta variant, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on July 27, 2021, issued updated guidance to include a recommendation of universal indoor mask wearing for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. The CDC recommendation follows a similar recommendation issued on July 19, 2021, by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Analysis: The number of reported new cases in Johnson County during the week of May 30, 2021, was 67. Following slight increases over the next few weeks, by the week of June 27, the number of new reported cases had increased to 163. Incidence increased substantially throughout July. Last week, the week of July 25, more than 900 cases were reported, more than 13 times the number of cases reported the first week of June. Over the summer, several clusters associated with school-age summer camp programs and childcare facilities have been reported. In some cases, partial program closures were necessary to contain the spread, resulting in additional burden and stress for the impacted families and care providers.

Current statistics show that while progress has been made in the areas of vaccination rates overall, the rate of full vaccinations among those ages 12-17 years in Johnson County is less than 40%. Also, there is no timetable for the availability of the vaccine for those under the age of 12 years.

While efforts to improve vaccination coverage among those eligible, including adolescents, continue, additional steps must be taken to reduce the risk of transmission. Students benefit from in-person learning and the interactions with others in the school setting. In-person learning was successful during the last school year because of the mitigation efforts that were in place, including wearing masks by students, faculty, and staff.

Funding Overview: This item has no funding impact.

Alternatives: Do not approve the Health Order, continue to monitor the infections and support strongly recommended actions for schools to implement.

Recommendation: Approve Health Order 001-21 that implements Public Health recommendations to slow and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in Johnson County, Kansas.

Purchasing Review: This item does not need Purchasing approval.

Budget Review: This item has no funding impact.

Legal Review: The Legal Department has reviewed and prepared the proposed resolution.