



To: All Unified School Districts and Schools in Crawford County, Kansas

From: The Office of the Health Officers, Crawford County Health Department

Re: Mitigation Recommendations and Justification for K-12 Schools

Date: 30 July, 2021

1. Current Situation.

- a. Crawford County, Kansas is currently experiencing its 4th major spike of COVID-19 (Sars-CoV-2) since the beginning of the pandemic in March, 2020. This current spike began the first week of July, 2021, and has progressed to 210 new cases for the week ending July 24th and we are on pace to exceed that number this week with 183 new cases by the 5th day of the week ending July 31st.
- b. The current spike in COVID-19 cases is attributed to the Delta Variant of COVID-19, which has shown to be 50% more transmissible and has shown greater capability to infect those that are younger, including infants.
- c. The impact on the medical community from the current spike of COVID-19 is significant, and this impact extends regionally throughout the 4-state area. The greatest impact is with hospitalization and limited ability to transfer patients to centers with appropriate capability to care for their specialized needs, including pediatrics.
- d. Vaccination rates in the county have improved and approximately 53 % of the county population has received the vaccine. The current spike in infection is largely attributable to those that are unvaccinated, but 10-20% of infections are breakthrough infections occurring in the vaccinated. Those who have completed vaccination are experiencing less severe disease and greater than 99% of all deaths nationally are in the unvaccinated group.
- e. The school districts throughout Crawford County are slated to return to in-person learning either August 12 or 18. There are approximately 6,500 students in the county returning to school in the K-12 grades.

2. Recommendations with justification.

- a. The Health Officers are recommending masking of all students and staff in the K-12 systems in the county through October 1, 2021 while indoors, on buses or other congregated modes of transportation.

- i. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) both have recommended masking in all K-12 systems in the United States.
 - 1. These organizations represent large bodies of scientists issuing recommendations for the public at large, without the benefit of knowing the capability of the community, the vaccination or infection density or community mitigation capability.
 - 2. While we agree with this recommendation, the County Health Officers have the benefit of much greater knowledge of the current situation within the county. The County Health Officers will continue to make recommendations based on the current situation and current science in a common-sense approach for our community.
- ii. Mask use is effective at reducing transmission of the COVID-19 virus.
 - 1. The Crawford County School systems were one of the few systems in the state and within the nation that was able to open with in-person learning and complete the school season last year. This was largely due to the mitigation efforts the school systems used, including masks. There were very few cases of in-school transmission last year and there were no significant adverse effects noted with mask wearing or other mitigation strategies employed within our systems, including harms to our students.
 - 2. Data collected and evaluated early in the 2020-2021 school year allowed the Health Officers to modify quarantine requirements as there was no significant in-school transmission of COVID-19 with mask wearing and 3 foot social distancing. This significantly decreased the number of students being quarantined.
- iii. There is significant community impact of COVID-19 to the community, especially the medical community.
 - 1. It is recognized that mitigation responsibility in the community does not rest solely on the schools. All persons in the community must do their part in mitigation, including vaccination, to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
 - 2. The medical impact currently also encompasses the Children's Hospital system and regional pediatric centers. This limits care and capability for caring for significantly ill children with COVID-19 or any other illness or injury that they may need care for.
 - 3. Approximately 1/3^d of the children in the county ages 12-18 have been vaccinated and every effort is being made to increase that number to protect our children and community. There is currently no vaccination option for children under 12. There are ongoing studies and it is hoped that vaccination will become available in the fall for children under 12.

- iv. Mask use in the school systems will significantly reduce the amount of exposure, and therefore quarantine, in our school systems.
 - 1. It is vitally important to keep our children in school in an in-person environment.
 - 2. Quarantine affects not only the child's learning, but has other adverse effects including impact on family finances, difficulty with childcare in working families, the child's nutrition and may impact their safety overall.
- b. The Health Officers recommend that the schools continue with mitigation strategies employed during the previous school year to reduce the spread of COVID-19 including:
 - i. It is prudent to continue with daily screening of each child as they enter the school or at the beginning of the school day. This may include temperature checks on entering the school if deemed appropriate by the responsible School Board. At a minimum, children entering school should be able to attest to having no symptoms associated with COVID-19, including fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, headache, body aches, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell or profound fatigue. Students with any of those symptoms should be directed to evaluation from on-site nursing personnel for further evaluation.
 - ii. Maintain social distancing standards of 3 feet between students to the greatest extent possible.
 - iii. It is recognized that gathering at eating times represents greater risk to students for transmission of COVID-19. The mitigation strategies to allow for social distancing or separation while eating should continue to be employed. Appropriate hand washing or sanitizing should occur before and after each meal.
 - iv. Serving guidelines should continue including mask wearing during meal preparation and serving. Previous serving guidelines recommended single use packaging and no self-service. New data from the CDC suggests there is very low risk of transmission from surfaces and shared objects. As such, there is no need to limit food service approaches to single use items and packaged meals.
 - v. Hand sanitizer should be readily available and employed throughout the school building. Students should sanitize when entering or leaving classrooms.
 - vi. Cleaning guidelines should continue from the previous school year, including scheduled cleaning of high contact areas, cleaning of tables between groups for meals, cleaning of desks when changing classes etc.
 - vii. Band and chorus guidelines should continue from previous year, including bell covers and cleaning protocols as well as distancing guidelines based on instrument. Chorus distancing requirements should continue while singing or performing.

3. Reevaluation time frame.
 - a. It is recognized that mitigation, including masking, carry both risk and benefits. In the absence of risk, there is no benefit. With that in mind, the Health Officers will reevaluate these recommendations every 2 weeks to determine if the mitigation strategies still show benefit in the setting of the current situation.
 - b. The masking recommendation through 1 October 2021 is based on the typical spike timeframe and may be reduced or extended based on weekly case count and community impact.
 - c. The Health Officers will continue with open communication with the leadership of each school district.
 - d. Interim guidelines from the Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Kansas State High School Activities Association and the United States Department of Agriculture are still pending and may impact, change or add to the current recommendations.

4. Questions or concerns should be directed to the undersigned.

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