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News release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kenosha County Public Health recommends universal masking in schools, institutions of higher education

KENOSHA — As school boards meet and prepare for the 2021-22 school year, Kenosha County Public Health is recommending the implementation of universal masking requirements for teachers, staff, students and visitors in all education systems, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status, Health Officer Dr. Jen Freiheit announced today.

This recommendation is in alignment with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Freiheit noted.

“We know that this isn’t what many people are wanting to hear as we begin the third school year affected by the pandemic,” Freiheit said. “But unfortunately, we’ve reached another critical moment where we must do all that we can to limit the spread of COVID-19, which is continuing to evolve and adapt as new variants take hold.”

“Going into the fall semester, K-12 schools and higher education institutions can play an important role by promoting the current health and safety benefits of masking,” Freiheit added.

Since the beginning of July, Kenosha County has seen a seven-fold increase in COVID-19 cases overall, including a six-fold increase in cases among children under 18 years old. Because of this, local public health officials urge school boards to consider these facts and vote in alignment with the national and statewide back-to-school universal masking guidance to keep children safe and healthy.

The Delta variant is highly transmissible and affects children much more than the original COVID-19. Adding another layer of protection on top of vaccination is needed to stop the spread, Freiheit said.

Given new evidence on the Delta variant, the American Academy of Pediatrics on July 9 updated its school guidance, recommending universal indoor masking and a layered approach to COVID-19 prevention strategies. This includes physical distancing, enhanced ventilation and handwashing.

On July 27, following suit with the AAP, the CDC updated its guidance, recommending universal masking in schools. A significant portion of the student population is not eligible to receive the vaccine, and masking is a proven tool in mitigating the spread of the COVID-19 virus and all of the new variants.

On August 4, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services released its updated COVID-19 K-12 school outbreak guidance. This information comes at a critical time when Wisconsin is experiencing a steady increase in COVID-19 cases. The CDC now classifies Kenosha County as having a high level of community transmission.

“Following these recommendations — along with getting vaccinated for those ages 12 and up who are currently eligible — will help to protect students, school staff and the community at large,” Freiheit said.

For more local details about COVID-19, including how to find a vaccination location near you, please visit the Kenosha County COVID-19 Response Hub website at <https://kenoshacounty.org/covid-19>.

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