

Memorandum

To: Leaders of Kenosha County School Districts and Institutions of Higher Education
From: Dr. Jen Freiheit, Kenosha County Health Officer
Date: August 9, 2021
RE: Update to COVID-19 Recommendations for Schools

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have committed to making in-person schooling a priority for the 2021-2022 academic year. In-person school is a goal supported by local health departments as well.

This goal is now easier to attain, compared with a year ago, due to several factors including a better understanding of COVID-19, increasing community vaccination rates, and the anticipation of vaccine availability for children under 12 years of age in fall. Yet, despite our increasing knowledge of COVID-19, the new Delta variant has demonstrated increased transmissibility and has reinforced the need to use all available layers of protection to lessen the spread of disease.

Key prevention strategies in all education systems include the following:

- **Vaccination is the most important prevention strategy for those currently eligible.**
 - Vaccination provides protection against COVID-19 and new variants, and also eliminates the need for quarantine if exposed.
 - Pharmacies, medical clinics, and public health continue to have COVID-19 vaccine readily available for everyone.

- **Masks are universally recommended to be worn indoors.**
 - Masks continue to provide reduced viral transmission and provide protection to the wearer and those around them.
 - In school settings many students are not currently eligible for vaccine due to their age (NOTE: Vaccination remains currently authorized only for those 12 years and older).
 - This is aligned with guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Updated CDC guidance is available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>.



- **Physical distance of at least three (3) feet is recommended in schools.**
 - As a result, the definition of a close contact in the school setting has been updated to include someone who has been within three feet of an infected person for more than 15 minutes.
 - When it is difficult to maintain physical distance of at least three feet, it is especially important to layer other prevention strategies (as outlined below).

- **Quarantine of close contacts is still a necessary and important step to control disease.**
 - Individuals identified as close contacts (see definition above) who are not fully vaccinated will be required to quarantine for 7 days (with testing and no symptoms) or 10 days (without testing and no symptoms); quarantined individuals must be excluded from in-person classes and activities.
 - Close contacts who are fully vaccinated will not be required to quarantine.
 - Quarantine, an important public health prevention strategy, is routinely employed for other vaccine-preventable diseases (i.e., measles, mumps) and tuberculosis
 - Wisconsin Statute 252.05(3) says that “[a]nyone having knowledge or reason to believe that any person has a communicable disease shall report the facts to the local health officer or to the department.”
 - Further, Wisconsin Statute 252.06(1) states that “[t]he department or the local health officer acting on behalf of the department may require isolation of a patient or of an individual under s. 252.041(1) (b), quarantine of contacts, concurrent and terminal disinfection, or modified forms of these procedures”
 - To clarify above, Wisconsin Statute 252.041(1)(b) states “[i]solate or quarantine, under s. 252.06, any individual who is unable or unwilling ... to receive vaccination”
 - Lastly, Wisconsin Statute 252.19 asserts “No person who is knowingly infected with a communicable disease may willfully violate the recommendations of the local health officer or subject others to danger of contracting the disease. No person may knowingly and willfully take, aid in taking, advise or cause to be taken, a person who is infected or is suspected of being infected with a communicable disease into any public place or conveyance where the infected person would expose any other person to danger of contracting the disease.”

- **Additional “layers of protection” are still recommended in school settings.**
 - These layers have been a focus in all exposure settings – workplaces, schools, etc. – throughout the pandemic.

- Additional layers of protection applicable to school settings include surveillance, testing, ventilation, handwashing and hygiene, staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing with isolation and quarantine, and cleaning and disinfection.
- Science continues to support that these measures work most effectively in combination with each other.

Recent guidance from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services agrees with the CDC recommendations. Recent guidance from national and state health agencies is largely unsurprising to local health officials who have been following the science and leading the pandemic throughout the past 18 months.

Schools and institutions of higher education are an important part of the overall community, and similarly play a strong role in the control of COVID-19. The implementation of these recommendations requires school leaders and school boards to create policies to support in-person learning in a manner that keeps students, faculty, and staff safe amid an ongoing pandemic. We look forward to continuing opportunities to engage in this effort.