



**HENRY & STARK COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

110 N. Burr Blvd., KEWANEE, IL 61443
309-852-0197 Main Office
103 1st., COLONA, ILLINOIS, 61241
309-792-4011



**Henry & Stark County Health Department, Henry County OEM, & Regional Office of Education
Statement on COVID-19 Prevention Strategies in Schools
July 21, 2021**

The Henry and Stark County Health Department (HSCHD), Henry County OEM, and Regional Office of Education (ROE) strongly recommend school districts begin the 2021-2022 school year with layered COVID-19 prevention strategies in place that are outlined in the updated Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for K-12 schools, which were fully adopted by the Illinois Department of Public Health. These prevention strategies include:

- Promoting vaccination,
- Consistent and correct mask use,
- Physical distancing,
- Screening testing to promptly identify cases, clusters, and outbreaks,
- Enhanced ventilation,
- Support for handwashing and respiratory etiquette,
- Staying home when sick and getting tested,
- Contact tracing, in combination with isolation, quarantine, and post-exposure viral testing, and
- Proper cleaning and disinfection.

HSCHD/OEM/ROE strongly recommend school districts begin the school year requiring that masks be worn indoors by all individuals (age 2 years and older) who are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19. CDC continues to recommend masking and physical distancing in schools as key prevention strategies, particularly as COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations rise. **Prevention strategies in schools will continue to evolve as COVID-19 community transmission declines to lower levels for sustained periods and when individuals under the age of 12 years are eligible to be vaccinated.**

At this time, individuals under the age of 12 years are not eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccine and therefore, this group of our students will not be fully vaccinated when they return to in-person school this fall. **The use of masks in schools by individuals who are unvaccinated will reduce school-based and community transmission of COVID-19, reduce the need for quarantine of students who are close contacts in school, and therefore keep more students learning in-person.**

To give this some local perspective the Health Department would like to share the following facts:

*** Henry & Stark Vaccination Rates: Of the 12-17 year olds eligible to receive the Covid vaccine only 37.2% of Henry County students aged 12-17 have received at least 1 dose and only 26.9% in Stark County. Of course 0% of our area's 5-11 year olds have been vaccinated as we await approval to do so.**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2





**HENRY & STARK COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT**
110 N. Burr Blvd., KEWANEE, IL 61443
309-852-0197 Main Office
103 1st., COLONA, ILLINOIS, 61241
309-792-4011



**Henry & Stark County Health Department, Henry County OEM, & Regional Office of Education
Statement on COVID-19 Prevention Strategies in Schools
July 21, 2021**

***CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**

*** The vast majority of our recent cases are of the unvaccinated population.** We are watching the Covid-19 Delta Variant very closely. It is increasing across the country and appears to be highly transmittable. It is also impacting young people in a way that previous variants have not.

CDC recently updated the definition of close contacts in school settings to exclude situations when students are wearing masks in the classroom at the time of their exposure within 3 to 6 feet to a COVID-19 case (Though IDPH is reviewing this update, they have not fully adopted this guidance). As a result, **requirements for students to wear masks in school if they are not fully vaccinated will decrease the number of students who must stay home and quarantine as a result of their close contact to a COVID-19 case. This will result in more students staying in school – the goal we all share.**

Schools should be supportive of people who are fully vaccinated, but choose to continue to wear a mask, as a personal choice or because they have a medical condition that may weaken their immune system. If schools are not reliably or consistently able to assess and track COVID-19 vaccination status, then schools may consider expanding the masking requirement to all students and staff (irrespective of COVID-19 vaccination status), toward promoting a safe environment for in-person learning.

We acknowledge each school district is unique and is under local control; as your partners, we stand firm in our belief that we must all work together to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our students, staff, and community. We must continue to protect ourselves and one another from the serious effects of COVID-19 disease. Our collective goal is to bring an end to this pandemic!

Respectfully submitted,

Duane Stevens,
Public Health Administrator
Henry & Stark County Health Dept.

Mat Schneppe,
Director of Emergency Management
Henry County OEM

Angie Zarvell,
Regional Superintendent of Schools
Bureau, Henry & Stark ROE

References

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools**
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Science Brief: Community Use of Cloth Masks to Control the Spread of SARS-CoV-2**
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 Schools and Early Care and Education Programs – Updated**
- **American Academy of Pediatrics Updates and Recommendations for Opening Schools in Fall 2021**