



JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Mark E. Wilson, MD

Health Officer

August 3, 2021

To: School Superintendents and Heads of Private Schools in Jefferson County

Re: Back-to-School Guidance from the Alabama Department of Public Health

We all want the same thing for all children in Jefferson County: high quality education in a safe and healthy environment. I am certain that you agree that one of the most important duties of a school leader is to keep children, teachers, and staff safe. Along with other public health officials, I believe that children should return to full-time in-person learning this year with layered prevention strategies in place.

Unfortunately, we are about to start a new school year in a major surge of COVID-19, almost entirely from the highly contagious delta variant. We are currently in an area of high transmission and at risk of outbreaks in our schools. Inpatient pediatricians here and in other high transmission areas of the country are starting to see more children with COVID-19 requiring hospitalization than with previous variants. Some of these children do not have underlying health conditions.

Regarding public schools, the State School Superintendent has made statements indicating that he is deferring to local school systems to determine their own mask policy. On July 30, State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris and the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) updated comprehensive state-wide back-to-school recommendations and guidance for K-12 school systems. That guidance may be found at: <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19/assets/cov-school-guidance-073021.pdf>

As I stated in the meeting with superintendents/leaders earlier today, I strongly urge you to adopt a policy for your system in accordance with the state guidance. Please continue to reach out to ADPH and the Jefferson County Department of Health with any questions, concerns, or for guidance that may assist you in creating a policy that effectively protects your students, teachers, staff, and their families. At this time, I believe the local school boards and authorities are in the best position to both develop and enforce their own policies on these issues. As the school year progresses, we will be monitoring the situation in the schools closely and working with you and state health and education officials to respond with the information and guidance you need to make your schools as safe and healthy as possible.

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