



2/17/2022

Re: COVID-19 Prevention in Educational Settings within Ottawa County, Michigan

The last two years have been difficult and have tested our community, and in particular our school systems, in innumerable ways. Based on the current local situation, it is now time to move from a state of emergency 'response' to a period of 'recovery'. As part of this recovery period, we note the following:

1. The Public Health Order dated January 11th of this year will expire at the conclusion of the school day on Friday February 18, 2022. There are no other public health orders related to COVID-19 presently in effect from the OCDPH.
2. The [CDC](#) and [MDHHS](#) have published guidance for COVID-19 mitigation in schools and many other settings. These agencies are expected to continue to produce evidence-based recommendations as the situation unfolds. That guidance is readily [accessible](#), and our school partners and parents are urged to follow these guidelines.
3. We recognize that the harms caused by COVID-19 are real and substantial, and that each individual's decisions affect the safety of others. We also recognize that COVID-19 mitigation comes with costs and should be weighed against other concerns and priorities. In this post-surge recovery stage, it is appropriate for individuals, educational settings, and others to weigh these considerations carefully and make decisions that best fit their own unique circumstances.
4. OCDPH will continue to monitor community-wide epidemiology, in accordance with our program requirements, and will intervene as appropriate when outbreaks and imminent hazards are identified.

Background:

Since this order was issued six weeks ago, pandemic conditions, particularly related to the Delta and Omicron variants, have changed significantly. At the time the order was issued:

- Weekly pediatric hospitalization rates nationwide were at their peak during the Omicron surge, and the order was issued as part of a strategy to protect and preserve capacity in our local healthcare systems already under strain from the Delta surge (see CDC [MMWR February 15, 2022](#) & [the CDC COVID Data Tracker](#))
- Local pediatric hospital census was still increasing at the time of the reconciliation order, and peaked 2 weeks later, remaining elevated compared to previous points in the pandemic even as case rates subsequently decreased.
- Area hospitals were overwhelmed (see [media coverage](#)), often resulting in long wait times for care for any health concern:
 - Hospitals were reporting the need for diversion of ambulances away from full emergency departments to other hospitals greater distances away.
 - West Michigan hospital systems were reporting their highest overall census since the pandemic started.
 - Federal healthcare teams were assigned to area hospitals to provide additional staffing assistance during the surge.

- Hospital systems were reporting hundreds of cases of COVID-19 among staff, further challenging the ability to provide needed care.
- With expected increases in COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant, as seen in other U.S. states, there was an imminent danger to the public health system, the health care system and the residents of Ottawa County.

Current data presents improving COVID-19 risk and preventative indicators including:

- Hospital systems report a steady decline in COVID-19 patient census over the last several weeks
 - Overflow patient care areas have systematically closed as the need for them decreases.
 - Fewer hospital staff are infected with COVID-19, alleviating critical staffing shortages.
 - Federal healthcare teams in West Michigan have completed their missions and assignments are not being renewed because in-house staffing is reaching adequate capacity.
 - More hospitals are returning to usual care strategies, reinitiating elective procedures, and utilizing emergency department diversion less.
- Vaccination availability for children age 5-18
 - About 41% are fully vaccinated.
 - Parents considering vaccination for their child(ren) have access to safety information, education, ample high-quality research, and multiple options to schedule vaccination.
- Case rates per 100,000 and COVID test positivity metrics have steadily declined for more than 3 consecutive weeks with higher percent declines among school age children. *The largest week to week decreases (week 4 to week 5) were among those aged 0-9 (-61%) and 10-19 (-56%) years (miottawa.org).*
- Local pediatric hospitalization rates are still above pandemic average, however, there has been a consistent downward trend. Weekly hospital pediatric census of children with confirmed COVID-19 reached 38 four weeks ago, 26 two and three weeks ago, and 19 last week.
- There is now greater access to at-home testing kits, effective well-fitted masks, and treatments for COVID-19 illness.

Please also be advised that nothing in this bulletin has any effect on any of the requirements currently in place from state or federal public health agencies, including:

- Students who test positive for [COVID-19 and/or other reportable infectious diseases](#) should continue to be excluded from school under the Michigan Public Health Code and [existing administrative rules](#) in accordance with current [CDC guidance](#). (See Michigan Public Health Code R325.175, [Administrative Rules for Communicable Diseases](#))
 - When school officials, local health department staff or personnel reasonably suspect that a student has a communicable condition (except HIV or AIDS), they may exclude the student for a period of time sufficient to obtain a determination by a physician or health officer as to the presence of the condition.
 - Individuals who have incomplete immunizations may be excluded from a school or childcare center if a vaccine preventable disease is either confirmed or suspected in the program.
 - High risk close contacts of known cases of COVID-19 and/or other reportable infectious diseases may be required to quarantine in accordance with current [CDC guidance](#).
 - A student may return to school when it is determined that he or she no longer represents a communicable disease risk to other students.

- Reporting COVID-19 cases, along with cases of other [reportable infectious disease](#), to the local health department is still required under Michigan Public Health Code and existing [administrative rules for communicable disease management](#).
- On January 29, 2021, CDC issued an [ORDER](#) that requires face masks to be worn by all people while on public transportation (which included all passengers and all personnel operating conveyances) traveling into, within, or out of the United States and U.S. territories. The CDC ORDER includes school buses, both public and private.

COVID-19, particularly the Omicron variant, continues to spread in our community.

- While the rescission of the January 11 Reconciliation Order shifts the enforcement of the mitigation strategies included in the order away from the Department of Public Health, it does not change the shared responsibility and critical need to continue to implement layered prevention strategies to maintain in-person learning and protect the health and safety of students, staff and community members.
- Public Health recommendations are guided and supported by scientific data and public health expertise. They should be used to guide decision-making during a pandemic without the need for additional state or local orders. This is the traditional role of public health authorities, who generally use orders only in such extreme circumstances as we have experienced over the past 2 years.
- Public health continues to recommend **layering** the following effective prevention strategies to prevent COVID-19 transmission:
 - [Promoting COVID-19 vaccination](#) for those eligible
 - [Consistent and correct use of masks](#) by people who are not fully vaccinated (and all during times of high community transmission)
 - [Physical distancing](#) among people who are not fully vaccinated
 - [Screening testing](#) in K-12 schools
 - Improving [ventilation](#)
 - [Handwashing](#) and [respiratory etiquette](#)
 - Staying home when sick and getting tested
 - Testing and [contact tracing](#) in combination with [isolation](#) and [quarantine](#), including Test to Stay as appropriate
 - Routine [cleaning with disinfection](#) under certain conditions.

We remain committed partners and will continue our support for and assistance with COVID-19 planning and response. Thank you for supporting your public health and medical workforce throughout the pandemic and for everything you have done to keep your students, staff and community safe during this unprecedented crisis. I can't tell you how much we value you, your dedication to your students and staff as well as your expert perspective. We have had many challenges yet have consistently shared the same goal of ensuring a safe, supportive learning environment that leads to student success.



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