

CUYAHOGA COUNTY  
BOARD OF HEALTH  
YOUR TRUSTED SOURCE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION

**August 21, 2020**

On July 30, our agency released COVID-19 recommendations for K-12 schools in our health jurisdiction (schools in Cuyahoga County with the exception of those in the City of Cleveland) for the upcoming school year:

<https://www.ccbh.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CCBH-school-recs-7.30.20.pdf>.

In this guidance, we recommend that schools begin the 2020-21 schoolyear operating remotely and that schools discontinue sports and other extracurricular activities during the remote learning period. We provided further clarification to this guidance on August 6:

<https://www.ccbh.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CCBH-HC-letter-re-school-recs-8.6.20.pdf>

As school districts review the recommendations and their plans, we recognize and respect their responsibility to make the decisions that best meet the needs of their respective school communities. As stated previously, these are recommendations, not Board of Health Orders, designed to provide evidence-based guidance. They were developed in response to requests from many school administrators for direction in terms of public health best practices.

We understand that school districts may exercise their discretion as they work through their final decision processes. We also understand that they may choose a different path. We know that a number of school districts have chosen full in-person or hybrid approaches. Others have adopted remote approaches to curriculum delivery. Similarly, several school districts have chosen to institute some form of extracurricular and sports activities. Others have discontinued these activities. We are committed to work with all of our schools as they implement their final plans.

We realize that the pandemic has made life very difficult for many children and families. We continue to meet with school superintendents on a weekly basis, with the facilitation of the Educational Services Center of Northeast Ohio. We also respond to daily requests for guidance from individual school districts regarding return-to school protocols, athletics or contact tracing of confirmed COVID-19 cases.

We clearly recognize that education and extracurricular activities are very important part of children's mental and physical health. We also understand the importance of resuming in-person activities when it is safe to do so. We will continue to support schools by providing surveillance, outbreak investigation and contact tracing for any outbreaks that are detected in the school environment. We are currently responding to COVID-19 cases associated with return-to-play sports in multiple school districts.

On August 20, Governor DeWine announced that Cuyahoga County would be moving to Risk Level 2 Public Emergency or "Orange" in the Ohio Public Health Advisory System for the first time. The Risk Level 2 designation indicates increased exposure and spread above the Level 1 designation. Counties at Risk Level 2 are advised by the Ohio Department of Health to exercise a high degree of caution.

This is certainly welcome news and an indication that we are beginning to move in the right direction. We will continue to monitor our local trends and share information each week about COVID-19 activity in our community.

Bearing in mind all of the information shared in this communication, we maintain our current recommendations under the current Risk Level 2 designation. The following factors are being monitored to determine the trends for COVID-19 transmission in the community and for school decision making:

**Positivity Rates** – A sustained decline in COVID-19 testing positivity rates below 5%

**New Case Reports** – A sustained decline in new cases, over a month period

**State Public Health Advisory System** – A Risk Rating of "Orange" or 2, or below over multiple weeks, which includes sustained improvement in the metrics as they relate specifically to our health jurisdiction.

**COVID-19 testing capacity for children** – there is currently little to no testing available for those under the age of 18 which dramatically complicates our outbreak response in the school setting. The lack of testing limits our response to a symptom-based investigation only

We face significant challenges ahead, including flu season, which is just around the corner. We anticipate that COVID-19 and flu will circulate in our community at the same time. Please continue to emphasize handwashing, cleaning and disinfecting, social distancing and facial coverings at all times.

Thank you for your commitment to keeping our community safe and healthy.