



<b>FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE DATE:</b> Friday, August 13, 2021	<b>Local Health Departments</b>	<b>Contact</b>
	Mahoning County Public Health	330-270-2855
	Columbiana County Health District	330-424-0272
	Trumbull County Combined Health District	330-675-2590
	Youngstown City Health District	330-742-8260
Warren City Health District	330-841-2612	

**Local Public Health Departments Recommend Universal Masking in K-12 Schools**

As K-12 schools prepare to start the new school year, Mahoning County Public Health, Youngstown City Health District, Columbiana County Health District, Trumbull County Combined Health District, and Warren City Health District support full in-person learning. To facilitate and maximize keeping our students safe in the classroom, while also minimizing the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, these health departments strongly recommend schools follow CDC guidance and adopt universal masking policies for all students, teachers, and staff regardless of their vaccination status. Moreover, we are urging all parents to send their children to school properly wearing a facemask, covering the nose and the mouth, especially in situations where a school district has not adopted a universal mask policy. This will prevent your child from disruptions from in person class or sports when a positive COVID-19 case occurs.

Our fight against COVID-19 is not over. COVID-19 variants have emerged that increase the risk of transmission and result in worsening illness. The Delta variant is rapidly becoming the dominant strain in Ohio. Because the Delta variant spreads so quickly, these strategies to reduce transmission in schools are critically important to protect students, teachers, staff, and communities.

It is proven that masking reduces transmission of the virus which causes COVID-19 and it also protects those who are not vaccinated. Because a significant portion of the student population is not yet eligible to be vaccinated, and as a state only half of our population is vaccinated, universal masking will add another layer of protection to keep our children in school.

Schools should continue to take a multi-pronged, layered approach to protect students, teachers, and staff. Hand washing and sanitizing continue to be important tools in preventing the spread of

COVID-19. Everyone should practice hand washing and proper respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes) to keep from getting and spreading COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. Additional recommended layers of protection include good ventilation and maintaining at least three feet of social distance between students.

Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Your local public health departments continue to urge all eligible individuals to be vaccinated as soon as possible. Locate a vaccine at [gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov](https://gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov) or contact your local public health department.

Due to the limitations Senate Bill 22 has placed on local public health, these are not orders but are data-driven and science-based recommendations and they follow CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations. The final decision regarding masking is made by the governing body of each district.

The local health departments will continue to work closely with their local schools to monitor the situation and provide updated recommendations as appropriate.

###