



Dear Superintendents,

As you likely know, on July 27, 2021, in response to the rapidly spreading Delta Variant and the rising number of cases throughout United States, the CDC announced new recommendations for mask wearing, changing their [Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People](#) and [guidance for K-12 Schools](#). The CDC now recommends:

- To maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent possibly spreading it to others, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission.
- Wearing a mask is most important if you have a weakened immune system or if, because of your age or an underlying medical condition, you are at increased risk for severe disease, or if someone in your household has a weakened immune system, is at increased risk for severe disease, or is unvaccinated. If this applies to you or your household, you might choose to wear a mask regardless of the level of transmission in your area.
- Given new evidence on the B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant, CDC recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status. Children should return to full-time in-person learning in the fall with layered prevention strategies in place. This guidance is consistent with recent [recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties, like counties across the state, are at a “Substantial Risk” for community transmission. In alignment with CDC’s updated guidance, Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) is now recommending that all individuals, regardless of vaccination status, wear a mask in indoor public places, including teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools.

CDC still urges, and TCHD strongly agrees with the importance of, the return to full in-person learning this fall, so long as proper mitigation strategies are in place. Mask wearing, like distancing, testing, and maximizing ventilation, adds a layer of protection to mitigate the risk of spread of COVID-19 in our schools. The implementation of mitigation strategies are especially important given the proliferation of the much more transmissible Delta Variant, with data showing that asymptomatic vaccinated people can still carry and spread the disease to others, potentially as readily as unvaccinated persons. As such, TCHD urges the implementation of universal masking policies in schools as an effective mitigation strategy to support safe in-person learning with limited interruption due to cases and outbreaks. **Like much of the guidance released by the CDC, CDPHE, and TCHD, for the 2021-22 school year, at this point, universal masking should be understood not as a requirement but as a strong science-based recommendation.** Whether or not you choose to make this a requirement in your schools, we urge you to convey this recommendation to your families, just as we will be doing to the community at large. We would also note that while we are hopeful that expanding vaccination and careful use of prevention strategies such as masks will help reduce community transmission of Delta and future variants, we have learned to expect the unexpected with COVID-19, and this approach may change over time as circumstances warrant in order to optimize safe in-person learning.

As you consider mitigation strategies for your unique communities, TCHD is available to answer questions and provide support. If you decide a universal masking policy is not a good fit for your



community, other mitigation strategies like the promotion of vaccination, distancing, testing and ventilation become more critical. Each mitigation strategy implemented limits the risk of disease spread and interruption to critical in-person learning.

Thank you,

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