



OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

Kate Brown, Governor

Oregon
Health
Authority

500 Summer St NE E-20

Salem, OR 97301

Voice: 503-947-2340

Fax: 503-947-2341

www.oregon.gov/oha

November 3, 2021

Shawn Hartfield, Chair
Michael Summers, Vice Chair
Jill Cummings, Director
Keri Lopez, Director
Liz Goodrich, Director
Redmond School Board of Directors

<sent via email: gina.blanchette@redmondschools.org>

Dear Chair Hartfield, Vice Chair Summers, and members of the Redmond School Board of Directors:

Thank you for your letter regarding public health policies for K-12 schools. We understand the frustrations you and your community have about the ongoing pandemic, and we share your eagerness to curb the spread of the virus so we can return to normalcy.

Two of the most important tools available to control COVID-19, the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, are vaccination and masking. However, children under the age of 12 are currently not eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccines authorized for emergency use. In order to protect students under age 12, individuals in their households who are not vaccinated, and those with underlying health conditions that make them more susceptible to complications from COVID-19, as well as to minimize the disruption of student education in schools because of exposure to a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, requiring universal use of masks inside schools is necessary.

On August 5th, the CDC updated the [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#) due to the highly contagious Delta variant. The guidance recommends universal masking in K-12 schools regardless of vaccination status and regardless of community transmission rates. The guidance also encourages schools to apply additional prevention measures for reducing the spread of SARS-CoV-2 within school settings in communities with high transmission rates.

OHA's Senior Health Advisors review monthly any new research from the [CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Review](#) related to transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and mitigation measures, and [epidemiological trends](#) at the regional and state level, including trends in [school outbreaks and in-school transmission](#), and make a recommendation on whether there is continued need for masking in school settings. At the November 2nd review, the Senior Health Advisors agreed that there should be no change in mask requirement at this time. Research continues to show benefits of masks as part of a layered mitigation strategy in schools. Cases are still high (per CDC) across Oregon, including some of the highest numbers among children from throughout the pandemic, there has been no vaccine available for those under 12 until today (and it will take some time before a large number of children are vaccinated), and hospital capacity is still very strained.

Evidence from the past year makes clear that in-person school is crucial in supporting the social-emotional health of students and their families. Face coverings is one of the [layers of protection](#) employed to keep kids in school by reducing the risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19. OHA in consultation with ODE recently updated the guidance for quarantine after masked outdoor exposures between students while in school.

The goal is to return to local decision-making. However, the virus sets the timeline. We anticipate vaccines becoming available for children under the age of 12 in the coming weeks, which will bring us closer to community immunity and reduce the need for the tools we are currently using to curb the spread of the virus.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any feedback, questions, or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P. Allen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Patrick M. Allen
Director