



Public Health
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Montgomery County
Public Health District

August 24, 2021

RE: Requested Letter of Advisement

Dear Montgomery County School Superintendents and School Board Members,

I prayed that I would not have to contact you again so quickly after my last letter. Unfortunately, over the 10 days since schools have started, we have seen a very rapid rise in cases of students and staff with newly diagnosed COVID 19. Since August 1st, 1773 Montgomery County students have tested positive for COVID 19, most in the last 10 days. Health officials from several school districts have called me for advice as they feel “overwhelmed” and “flooded” with the case load and only see the numbers of cases accelerating. Unfortunately, this situation was not unexpected because we placed a large number of students, staff, and teachers into confined classrooms, buses, and hallways. Infected students and staff are coming to school and exposing every other person in their classroom and hallway to SARS-CO-V 2, the virus that causes COVID 19. This could be prevented by one simple, cheap measure: wearing a mask. Students age 12 years and older have the opportunity to be vaccinated to offer an extra layer of protection, but only the minority are vaccinated. The unvaccinated students and staff have only one protective measure and it is mask utilization.

Although Executive Order GA38 prohibited mandating mask use, the largest school districts in Texas have taken the action of proceeding with mandating masks in their schools to protect their students, staff, and teachers. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has recently stated in its Public Health Guidance letter dated August 19, 2021 that they would not enforce the GA38 ban on mask mandates while there is still pending litigation. This offers our Montgomery County School Districts the opportunity to require masks, at least for the next few weeks, to try to save the current school semester. Texas is a large state and mask requirement may not be appropriate everywhere, but in Montgomery County, there is a public health emergency and it requires immediate action.

I recommend that as School Superintendents and School Board Members, you require mask utilization by all students, staff, and teachers in Montgomery County schools and buses to try to prevent further spread of COVID 19 within the school system. This was very successful during the entire 2020-2021 school year and allowed our schools to remain open when many other school districts did not. If you do not feel that you can recommend mandatory mask use, then you should be on record as “strongly recommending” mask use rather than continually quoting that masks are “optional”. The term optional is leading some in the community to feel that masks are not necessary. I guarantee you that mask use is quite necessary right now.



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Ten days ago, there appeared to be a plateau in the new cases of COVID 19 in our county, which made me optimistic that our current wave of infections may be ending. However, after school started, we have recorded 2 of the 10 highest daily new case counts of the entire pandemic. I am no longer optimistic.

School representatives keep calling my office asking for advice to stop the new cases in their schools. Let me reiterate, the medical advice that was effective in keeping our schools open last school year has not changed: 100% mask utilization, social distancing when able, do not come to school with any symptoms of COVID until you test negative, quarantine after a classroom or home exposure to COVID 19 if you are unvaccinated and no masks were utilized, wash your hands frequently, get vaccinated when eligible.

Thank you,

Charles R. Sims, MD

Montgomery County Local Health Authority