



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Montgomery County
Public Health District

Update to the August 24 Letter of Advisement

Date: March 5, 2021

To: The Montgomery County Area Public School Superintendents

From: Charles Sims, MD
Montgomery County Public Health Authority

Randy Johnson, Executive Director
Montgomery County Public Health District

Regarding: Follow-up Guidance Memorandum Regarding Precautions following the Governor's executive order GA-34

The Governor's executive order (GA-34) included many topics including business capacity and mask utilization. Texas is a very large state and situations are different in local areas. The Governor now has released the statewide guidance on mask utilization and will allow counties to make restrictions as appropriate for their local situation. In Montgomery County, we have had a decrease in new COVID cases since our peak in late January 2021, but we still have as many new cases daily as we did our first peak in the second week of July 2020. It is not reasonable currently to decrease mask utilization in public places, business with multiple customers, or especially in schools. The drop in cases is mostly due to the lack of family gatherings since the holiday season. We have only vaccinated a small percentage of the county (approximately 10%) and not enough have been vaccinated to protect from another rise in cases if we do not continue to follow our current guidelines. Although there are now a few therapeutic options for people with COVID-19, there is no intervention for prevention of COVID-19 except masking, social distancing, and vaccination.

Schools will continue to need 100% mask utilization to protect students and teachers and **assure in-person learning**. Our schools have done a fantastic job of using 100% mask utilization by students, staff, and teachers to prevent spread of COVID-19 within classrooms. This has allowed our local schools to stay open since August 2020 when many schools across the state and nation have not opened or opened only in a very limited capacity. Only a very small number of students, teachers, or staff qualify for vaccination at this point. The CDC guidelines for quarantine have not changed, so if a student or teacher comes to school and is not wearing a mask and is found to have COVID-19, the entire class or multiple classes will have to quarantine for 14 days. At our current level of cases of positive students and teachers, it would only be a matter of a few weeks before we would have to return to 100% virtual school if masks are not worn.

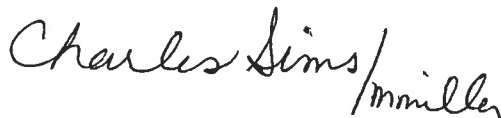
Experience has taught us that if staff properly and continuously wear PPE, they greatly reduce the possibility of becoming infected. The Primary goal is to keep students and teachers in the classroom.

We recommend the continuation of the following precautions:

- o All teachers and staff should wear a mask in the classroom and in any enclosed area, or in any area where you may be within six feet of another person.
- o If teachers or staff wear a face shield, they should also wear a mask with the face shield. Wearing the face shield doesn't filter any of the air you are inhaling. It also allows the air you are exhaling to float in the air longer, to possibly land on someone or something.
- o MCPHD recommends that students of all ages, including students under eight years of age, wear a mask at all times during the school day to reduce risk of infection.
- o Students should be told to not share masks.
- o Teachers and students should practice good and frequent hand washing/cleansing.
- o Teachers and students should refrain from touching their face, nose, eyes.
- o Note- MCPHD does not recommend wearing gloves in place of frequent hand hygiene. Wearing the same pair of gloves throughout the day spreads germs just as does the absence of hand hygiene.
- o MCPHD recommends frequently disinfecting the environment, especially often-touched surfaces (desk tops, door knobs) throughout the day.
- o When possible, limit crowd size. Try to insure that individuals in crowds can remain six feet away from each other.
- Monitor staff and students for fever, coughing, sore throat, and/or loss of taste and/or smell.

Together each of us is responsible for keeping our schools open and keeping all our staff, teachers, and students safe. Continuous diligence regarding mask-wearing, hand washing, cleaning the environment, and distancing from one another remain the keys to completing the school year with in-class instruction.

Regards,



Charles Sims, MD, LHA
Montgomery County Public
Health District



Randy Johnson, Executive Director
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