



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**August 10, 2021**

**The Health Departments of Ashtabula County:  
Ashtabula City Health Department,  
Ashtabula County Health Department and  
Conneaut City Health Department**

## **STATEMENT RECOMMENDING UNIVERSAL MASKING IN K-12 SCHOOLS.**

As the 2021-22 K-12 school year prepares to begin, the Health Departments of Ashtabula County (HDAC) support full in-person learning. To facilitate and maximize keeping our students safe in the classroom, while also minimizing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, HDAC strongly recommends schools follow CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidance and adopt universal masking policies for all students, teachers, staff and visitors **regardless** of their vaccination status.

Reduced transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 is accomplished through masking. Because a large portion of the student population is not eligible to be vaccinated and vaccination rates are low for those who are eligible, universal masking will add an additional layer of protection to keep our children in school.

In addition to masking, schools are advised to follow layered prevention strategies. These same strategies were very effective at controlling COVID-19 during the 2020-21 school year. These strategies include: Handwashing, proper respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes), frequent sanitizing, good ventilation and maintaining at least three feet of social distance between students to protect them.

COVID-19 is a vaccine-preventable respiratory illness. COVID-19 can spread rapidly among individuals who are not fully vaccinated. 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. To date, less than half of Ashtabula County residents are vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus. HDAC continues to urge all eligible individuals to be vaccinated as soon as possible.

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 AAP recommendations. The final decision regarding masking is made by the governing body of each school district.

HDAC will continue to work closely with local schools to monitor the COVID-19 situation and provide updated recommendations as appropriate.