

May 20, 2021

Dr. Zydowsky and SDMA School Board Members:

It is our recommendation, in line with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Wisconsin Department of Health Services (WI DHS), and the Dunn County Public Health Department (DCPH) to continue with universal masking at school to help to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including during summer school 2021. Please see attached infographic (please note change of age eligible 12+ for COVID-19 vaccine as of 5/13/2021). Also please see attached letter to school administrators from Wisconsin DHS 5/18/2021). As Dr. Zydowsky has mentioned in his weekly updates, COVID-19 is still circulating in our community. Counties to our west are having challenges with higher disease activity. One or more variants of COVID-19 have been identified in these areas. School nurses from these areas have reported more spread of COVID-19 in schools that was not as prevalent earlier this school year. People, including children, can have poor outcomes if infected and/or have to miss a significant amount of time out of work/school/activities if sick or exposed.

Many families registered their child(ren) for summer school with the knowledge that mitigation measures would be in place, including required mask use. This was in writing on page 21 of the summer school brochure and page 4. Many of our students are currently not eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination, and those that are eligible will not be fully vaccinated for several weeks yet.

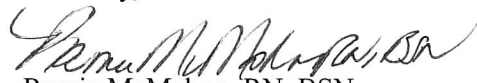
Most adults and 16+ students in our community are not fully vaccinated at this time. People that are not vaccinated have a higher risk of becoming ill and spreading COVID-19 to others. Based on some of the experiences we have had with contact tracing in our district, we have learned that some adults become ill and may choose not to get tested for COVID-19 - or get tested many days after first becoming ill. These adults expose others, including the children in their home. Some families don't fully adhere to the current testing and symptom exclusion protocols. Therefore, some children may come to school exposed, may become infectious at school, and then possibly expose other children and/or staff to COVID-19. Unfortunately some people do go to work/school/activities when sick, or shortly after feeling better, and do not think they could be infectious with COVID-19. The multiple mitigation measures, including universal masking, are important to keep in place, especially if other protocols are not adhered to by families. Most people have done a great job following the protocols the WI DHS and DCPH have asked us to implement, but it is not always consistent with every family. This can put other people at risk.


Some children not yet eligible for vaccination may be at higher risk for poor outcomes if infected with COVID-19 due to health needs. Normally healthy children can also have poor outcomes from COVID-19. Even children with mild symptoms have developed MIS-C (multisystem inflammatory syndrome)
<https://www.cdc.gov/mis-c/>

The masks, in addition to other mitigation tools, have helped reduce the spread of illnesses in general at school. The testing and exclusion protocols from WI DHS and DCPH have not changed since the start of the 20-21 school year, with two exceptions. Some people that are close contacts and asymptomatic may be eligible for the shortened quarantine options. Also, people that are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine if exposed and are asymptomatic. However, the symptom exclusion criteria is strict. It would be helpful to have new guidance from WI DHS and DCPH for these protocols before pulling back on mitigation tools such as universal masking. If masks are optional and illnesses spread more, there may be an increase in the number of students excluded from school if they become ill or a household member becomes ill.

Continuing with universal masking, in addition to the other mitigation measures, will help make district-sponsored in-person opportunities for students, families, and staff as safe and successful as possible. As more people become vaccinated and the COVID-19 activity level gets lower, the CDC, WI DHS, and DCPH can help guide school districts on reducing mitigation tools in the safest way possible. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,


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