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Smart and Safe School Reopening guidance moved to phase Yellow based on increase of new cases

LAWRENCE – Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health has moved its recommendation for the [COVID-19 Smart and Safe School Reopening Guidance](#) to phase Yellow based on an increase in the past week in the [number of new cases per day](#) reflected in the 14-day moving average. Information on the current phase recommendation is available at <https://ldchealth.org/457/Smart-and-Safe-School-Reopening>

Based on currently available science and public health expertise, the guidance and phased recommendation tool are designed to help K-12 schools and parents make decisions on when to offer in-person instruction and activities and when to institute mitigation practices. The criteria are based on public health metrics, including the 14-day moving averages of percent of positive tests and new COVID-19 cases in Douglas County. It also includes a metric based on the level of absenteeism.

The [recommended phase](#) moved from Green to Yellow on Thursday, as LDCPH updates its recommendation each Thursday. The county’s 14-day moving average for new cases per day increased from less than 12 cases last Thursday to more than 30 cases this week.

“We recognize that the entry testing and high number of tests of University of Kansas students drove the number of new cases. Given those COVID-19 cases are now in our community, we believe it’s prudent to move to phase Yellow,” Director Dan Partridge said.

In another metric, the county’s 14-day moving average positivity rate did decline to 3.2% in the past week. Partridge said that was due to the KU entry tests contributing to a large increase in the number of people tested, which leaders took into account in deciding the phase.

The phase Yellow recommendation is for K-12 schools to offer hybrid instruction and includes no all-school activities at the elementary level and no high-risk activities at the middle school and high school levels.

The guidance defines high-risk sports as those that involve close, sustained contact between participants, lack of significant protective barriers and a high probability that respiratory particles will be transmitted between participants. Examples listed are wrestling, football, rugby, lacrosse, competitive cheer, dance, basketball, soccer, water polo, ice hockey and field hockey.

“Those high-risk sports have a higher chance of transmission of the virus based on the nature of the virus being transmitted through respiratory droplets. We understand the importance of sports, for mental health and physical conditioning and the importance to children and parents,” said Dr. Thomas Marcellino, Douglas County’s Local Health Officer. “The recommendation is to slow the spread of the virus into the community



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and into populations that may be at higher risk of complications. We hope to reduce the number of cases so we can get back to the extracurricular activities that we all enjoy.”

The guidance defines high-risk, non-sport activities to include band (with exception of percussion, strings), choir, cheerleading or any other unmasked singing or shouting.

The public health metrics in the guidance also include an absenteeism rate and school staffing ratio. Director of Informatics Sonia Jordan said Douglas County school leaders are encouraged to complete the KDHE COVID-19 School Absenteeism Survey each week to supply data.

The full [guidelines](#) are available at douglascountyks.org/coronavirus or kdhealth.org/coronavirus.

Leaders of Douglas County, City of Lawrence, Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health, LMH Health, University of Kansas, Lawrence Public Schools and The Chamber participate in the Education Unified Command structure, and leaders of Douglas County public and private schools have been represented in conversations to draft these guidelines.

Members of the public can also check douglascountyks.org/coronavirus or kdhealth.org/coronavirus for information about COVID-19 in Douglas County.

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