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Smart and Safe School Reopening guidance moved to phase Green as metrics continue to improve

LAWRENCE – Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health has moved its recommendation for the [COVID-19 Smart and Safe School Reopening Guidance](#) to phase Green as metrics have continued to improve in recent weeks – the county’s positivity rate on Thursday was 4.6% and the county’s 14-day moving average of new cases per day [continues to trend downward](#) since August.

The [Green phase recommends](#) in-person or hybrid classroom instruction and standard mitigation for activities. The county’s guidance had been in phase Yellow since late August after spikes in the number of new cases per day and the county’s positivity rate increased to above 9% in the wake of University of Kansas entry testing.

“We are grateful that our numbers have continued to trend in a positive direction, which is indicative of the effectiveness of the measures we’ve taken and how our community members have done a great job with masking up and following guidance,” said Dr. Thomas Marcellino, Douglas County’s Local Health Officer. “We developed these guidelines based on the best scientific and medical advice we have to recommend safe environments for our schools. As a community we also recognize the educational, psychosocial and mental health benefits to students in being able to get them into classroom environments if it is safe. The community has really stepped up to help get us back to Green. We are grateful for that and, we are asking people to keep it up so we can stay in this phase.”

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 rate and staffing ratios that schools can use to guide their own decisions.

The Douglas County guidance [uses a 14-day moving average](#) to consider the rate of new cases per day in the community, while the Kansas Department of Health and Environment school gating criteria uses a two-week cumulative incidence rate of the number of new cases for a two-week period per 100,000 people.

“We’re using a two-week block that moves along with us, and so that gives us a more up-to-date idea of how things are going, and it allows us to see trends better or sooner,” said Dr. Jennifer Schrimsher, an infectious disease specialist at LMH Health and member of the Douglas County Unified Command Safety Team who helped develop the school guidance.

The [recommended phase](#) moved from Yellow to Green on Thursday, as LDCPH updates its recommendation each Thursday. The full [guidelines](#) are available at douglascountyks.org/coronavirus or ldchealth.org/coronavirus