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Health officers encourage vaccinations amid spreading of Delta variant, timeline ahead of school year beginning

Fully vaccinated individuals can be exempt from quarantine, if asymptomatic

LAWRENCE – Douglas County’s 14-day moving average of [new COVID-19 cases](#) per day has increased by seven in the past two weeks, marking the steepest increase since January. Given the recent increase, the local health officers say the timing is important now for those eligible but unvaccinated to make a vaccine appointment, especially as the community prepares to start the new school year in August.

“With the more contagious Delta variant on the rise stemming from spread in communities around us, the trajectory does not look good right now for a potential wave that could push through before the new school year begins,” said Local Health Officer Dr. Thomas Marcellino. “Now is definitely the time to take extra precautions to protect our community, especially getting vaccinated if you haven’t and wearing a mask in public if you are currently unvaccinated.”

Unlike prior increases of new cases, this one occurs in an environment where more than 50 percent of the county’s eligible population is fully vaccinated, which is providing protection from serious illness for those who have received the vaccine.

Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health currently has no reports of a fully vaccinated resident having to be hospitalized for COVID-19. And nearly 70 percent of the new Douglas County cases reported in July have occurred among unvaccinated but eligible people.

Marcellino said it’s important for all adults and eligible children to get vaccinated and practice mitigation to protect children younger than 12 who are currently not eligible for the vaccine.

LDCPH plans to follow the [CDC’s school guidance](#) for the school year, which includes:

- Masks indoors for anyone unvaccinated;
- Following quarantine and isolation protocols to protect against spread of the disease;
- Promote practices of good handwashing, hygiene and cleaning of environments as well as screening of individuals for potential COVID-19 symptoms;

- Provide information to the public on levels of community spread of COVID at LDCHealth.org, the [COVID-19 Epidemiological Dashboard](#) and [Douglas County Coronavirus Hub](#) to allow schools, organizations, families and individuals to make best decisions on how to be smart and safe for their own operations and activities.

Marcellino said some parents of children 12 and older likely will want to consider vaccinating their kids now in the weeks before school starts, because fully vaccinated individuals are exempt from quarantine protocols, if they remain asymptomatic.

“We know the last school year provided a lot of instability at being able to keep students in the classroom, so we are hopeful that with more vaccinated adults and students, it will eliminate much of the frustration for families of having to quarantine children who are exposed, because the fully vaccinated individuals as close contacts can remain in school if they remain symptom free,” he said.

Dr. Jennifer Schrimsher, deputy local health officer and infectious disease specialist at LMH Health, said unvaccinated residents of all ages who have resumed normal activities without adequate protection are most at risk.

“Anyone unvaccinated, including children age 2-11, right now should wear a mask while visiting indoor public places, when they are in crowded outdoor settings and for activities where they will have close contact with others who are not fully vaccinated,” Schrimsher said. “The current vaccines available in the United States have demonstrated to be effective at preventing hospitalization and death due to COVID-19, so please get vaccinated if you have not yet. Now is a very critical time.”

Anyone interested in booking a vaccine appointment or learning more about incentives for getting vaccinated can visit [LDCHealth.org/COVIDVaccine](#). Businesses and organizations interested in LDCPH providing a vaccine clinic or COVID testing on site can also visit [LDCHealth.org/COVIDClinic](#) to make a request.

More information about Douglas County’s COVID-19 response is available at [douglascountyks.org/coronavirus](#) and [LDCHealth.org/Coronavirus](#).