July 30, 2021

Dear Jeffco Public Schools community,

We hope you are enjoying a wonderful summer. We look forward to the new school year, which begins August 17. Here are updates regarding our COVID-related health protocols for the 2021-22 school year.

First, we must say Congratulations Jefferson County! Our residents are currently at a vaccination rate of nearly 74% of people ages 12 and older with at least one COVID vaccine. We exceeded the county vaccination goal of >70%! While this is great progress, we are weighing changing health guidelines for schools and, as of today, national, state, and local guidance is not aligned.

As you read the following, please know our primary goal is to keep students in school as much as possible and maintain a consistent learning environment within each classroom. The following goes into effect on your school’s first day of school, which for most is August 17th.

On July 29, Jefferson County Public Health (JCPH) released an announcement recommending that all people return to wearing masks indoors regardless of vaccination status. JCPH has also indicated to us they will strictly enforce quarantine guidelines for exposure to COVID, and they have the legal authority to do so. They have indicated they will require quarantines for routine classroom exposure for anyone unvaccinated and not wearing a mask. This has major implications for our students age 11 and under, who are not eligible for the vaccination at this time.

Quarantines greatly interrupt learning for healthy children. In order to avoid quarantines of numerous students in any one classroom or school who may have been exposed to a positive case, we will require masks for students ages 3 to 11 (generally PK through 6th grade) in all schools while indoors. Once a student becomes fully vaccinated (currently eligible at age 12 or older) masks are recommended, but not required. If a student has a unique need that prohibits them from wearing a mask, families should contact their school as soon as possible to begin the 504 process or secure their medical or religious exemption.

For students age 12 and above (generally 7th through 12th grade), masks indoors are strongly recommended for unvaccinated students, and recommended for vaccinated students in alignment with the guidance from JCPH. Our schools and buildings are mask-friendly environments. Families should be aware they may be contacted by JCPH for the purpose of quarantine if their student is unvaccinated, unmasked, and exposed to COVID. We strongly encourage anyone who is eligible to get the vaccine as soon as possible and if not vaccinated to consistently wear a mask while in school.

Do keep in mind, these protocols could change and become more relaxed or restrictive, depending on COVID conditions in our community throughout the school year. While recognizing our number one priority is student health and safety, we also want to maximize in-person learning to the greatest extent by minimizing COVID quarantines and keeping schools open. We will revisit this decision if the case count in our county reduces to 35/100,000 per CDPHE current guidelines and/or the vaccine becomes available for children under age 12. The case count is currently at 77/100,000, an increase of 300% in the last 11 days, so we are not trending in a good direction.

In order to also ensure the health and safety of our staff, and avoid staff quarantines that greatly affect our ability to effectively operate schools and the district, all Jeffco Public Schools staff (all schools and departments) will be
required to notify the district of their vaccination status by August 16 through our online system in our Employee Self Service (ESS). If a staff member is unvaccinated, they are required to wear a mask indoors at any of our district facilities. It is recommended that vaccinated staff also wear a mask in alignment with the guidance from JCPH. Visitors and volunteers will be welcome at our schools; however, all visitors will be required to wear masks while in our buildings.

Our primary goal in making this decision is to maintain an uninterrupted in-person learning experience for our students. We simply cannot take the risk of extensive quarantines and fluctuating attendance which will keep so many healthy students out of school. Again, this decision will be revisited as we observe improvements in our case counts and vaccination status within the county. We are hopeful that a vaccine will be available for all of our students very soon. In addition, we need to be flexible this school year. Changes to operations may occur over time based on county case rates, school-based outbreaks, number of quarantines, and any public health order that may come from our county, state, or federal government.

Each Charter school will be communicating individual specific mask protocols to Charter students and families.

SUMMARY

- Jeffco Public Schools is strongly encouraging, but not requiring, staff and students to get the COVID-19 vaccination. Those who are fully vaccinated (14 days from their last dose) will not need to be quarantined if exposed. JCPH-hosted vaccine locations can be found here and throughout our county.
- Masks are required for students ages 3-11 (generally grades PK-6), unless the student is fully vaccinated (currently eligible to receive a vaccine at age 12 or older).
- For students age 12 and above (generally 7th through 12th grade), masks indoors are strongly recommended for unvaccinated students, and recommended for vaccinated students in alignment with the guidance from JCPH.
- Staff are required to notify the district of their vaccination status by August 16. Masks are required for unvaccinated staff and recommended for vaccinated staff.
- Masks are required for all individuals on school buses under federal order.
- Masks are required for all visitors and volunteers in school buildings regardless of vaccination status.
- We will continue frequent hand washing and cleaning.
- Individuals are encouraged to remain at least 3 feet away from non-household contacts when possible.
- Self-monitor using our self-screening tool. Anyone experiencing symptoms should stay home.
- When outbreaks occur, Jeffco Public Schools will work with JCPH to determine the appropriate response. This could include masks indoors, additional distancing, testing, contact tracing, and quarantining.
- Jeffco Public Schools encourages use of outdoor spaces and fresh air ventilation, such as opening windows and use of box fans. We have made significant improvement over the past year and continuing through this year on our building ventilation systems. More information is available here.

Those interested in a 100% online learning environment for 2021-22 may consider attending the Jeffco Remote Learning Program. The enrollment period closes at noon on Thursday, August 12.

We will have more updates on other back-to-school components soon, and will communicate with you via our Community Update, social media, and on our website. Please know, there continue to be many moving parts, including expected guidance from CDPHE, following the CDC’s announcement earlier this week and then follow up announcements from Jefferson County Public Health. Please stay tuned.

Thank you for your continued partnership. We encourage everyone to listen to the recommendations from Jefferson County Public Health so that we can bend the curve downward before school starts. We are #BetterTogether, Jeffco!

Jeffco Public Schools