



Statement on Covid-19 Control in Schools

September 15, 2021

Overview

The Association of Ohio Health Commissioners (AOHC) urges Ohioans to follow U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for the prevention and control of Covid-19 in our communities. These recommendations include Covid-19 vaccination of all eligible persons and the wearing of masks by all persons in public indoor settings, including schools, and the isolation and quarantine of persons with Covid-19 infection and exposure.¹ This statement addresses the scope and limits of local health department (LHD) responsibility for Covid-19 control in schools.

Covid-19, Schools, and Local Health Departments

Under Ohio law, local health departments have the duty and authority to issue isolation orders to students and school staff who have a medical diagnosis of Covid-19, and quarantine orders to students or school staff who are close contacts of a medically diagnosed case. LHDs adhere to Ohio law² for the exercise of this authority in schools and other community settings with advice from local legal counsel.³ Schools do not have the authority to quarantine or isolate students or staff, but they are required to exclude a child from school upon notification from the local health department. In practice, LHDs work closely with their schools to appropriately identify and then isolate or quarantine infected or exposed persons in the school setting.

Senate Bill 22, enacted by the Ohio legislature earlier this year, places restrictions on the authority of local health departments to institute emergency measures during disease outbreaks that LHDs have exercised for more than a century in Ohio. This means that LHDs no longer have the authority to impose mask mandates and other effective disease control measures in schools or other community venues. AOHC believes that these changes to the law seriously handicap LHDs and their communities in the response to the current pandemic and to future disease outbreaks.

Nevertheless, school boards of education do have the ability to require masks for their students, staff and visitors, and AOHC, in collaboration with our LHDs, urges universal masking requirements in all schools within their jurisdictions.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/guidance.html>

² Applicable Laws/Rules: O.R.C. 3313.68, 3707.07, 3707.08, 3707.16

³ K-12 Quarantine in Ohio, Ohio Department of Health, August 31, 2021