



Rationale for Issuing a Public Health Order Requiring Masking in Schools and Child Care Facilities

Public Health Authority:

- TCHD, as the local public health agency for Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties; has the duty to investigate and control the causes of epidemic or communicable diseases and conditions affecting the public health.

COVID-19 and the Delta Variant:

- COVID-19 is a communicable disease transmitted through respiratory or aerosolized droplets that people expel when they breathe, cough, or sneeze and many people can be infected with COVID-19 and be asymptomatic yet still contagious, even those who are vaccinated.
- The Delta variant now makes up nearly 100% of new cases in Colorado, is approximately twice as contagious as previous variants of COVID-19, and may cause more severe illness particularly in unvaccinated persons. Unvaccinated people remain the greatest concern for continued COVID-19 spread and disease burden.
- Fully vaccinated people with Delta variant breakthrough infections can spread the virus to others.
- According to the CDC, COVID-19 continues to pose a serious risk, especially to individuals who are not fully vaccinated, and certain mitigation measures in addition to vaccination remain necessary to protect against COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.
- The spread of COVID-19, exacerbated by the Delta Variant, continues throughout TCHD's jurisdiction and has been increasing for nearly 6 weeks.

Recommendations from Subject Matter Experts:

- In response to spread of the Delta Variant and to prioritize critical in-person learning, the CDC has recommended universal masking for all individuals in P-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status and level of community transmission, K-12 schools. A recommendation endorsed by several expert groups including TCHD, CDPHE, American Academy of Pediatrics, and CO Chapter of the America Academy of Pediatrics.
- The CDC has also recommended that all individuals, including those who are fully vaccinated, wear a face covering in all public indoor settings in areas of substantial or high transmission. As of August 17, 2021, the CDC identifies Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties as areas with high transmission.
- While the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children is clear, Children's Hospital Colorado clarified that mask wearing has not been linked to mental health problems in children or any other group and did not contribute to their declared 'state of emergency' for pediatric mental health.

Science Behind Masking:

- Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent transmission of COVID-19, to limit COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths and to prevent the health care system from becoming overwhelmed. When vaccination is not possible a layered mitigation strategy including wearing face coverings, testing, social distancing, hand hygiene, and ventilation decreases risk of transmission of COVID-19. In Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties approximately 232,787 children are not yet eligible (under 12 years of age) for vaccination.
- Research supports that mask wearing has no significant adverse health effects for wearers. Mask wearing is safe and is not associated with clinically significant impacts on respiration or gas exchange.
- Scientific evidence shows that the wearing of facial coverings by individuals assists in reducing virus transmission by reducing the spread of respiratory droplets. The CDC has found that adopting universal masking policies can help avert future lockdowns, especially if combined with other non-pharmaceutical interventions such as social distancing, hand hygiene, and adequate ventilation.

- In the school setting, universal mask wearing requirements are intended to reduce disruptive isolations and/or quarantines.
- Close contact with large groups of non-household members for extended periods of time indoors - conditions inherent to childcares and school settings - create a less safe environment for unvaccinated children if universal masking is not implemented. This is particularly important to address with individuals younger than 12 years who are not yet eligible for vaccination.
- Transmission of COVID-19 in these settings would pose considerable risk to individuals, including:
 - (1) risk to the health of children, especially those not yet eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine,
 - (2) risk of transmission to family and others outside of the childcare and school settings, especially for those at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, and
 - (3) risk of interference with in-person learning and other activities due to isolation of positive cases and quarantine of children exposed in these situations.