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Public Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 20, 2021

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**Kent County Health Department and Ottawa County Department of Public Health
Issue Public Health Orders Requiring Mask Use in Pre-K-6 Educational Settings**

GRAND RAPIDS, MI. (August 20, 2021) – The Kent and Ottawa administrative health officers issued public health orders today for their respective jurisdictions requiring masks be worn in pre-kindergarten through sixth grade educational settings. These Orders were issued to protect vulnerable individuals and those who are not yet vaccinated, to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in schools and the community, and to minimize interruptions to in-person learning.

The Orders are issued pursuant to the [Michigan Public Health Code](#) (MCL 333.2451 and 333.2453, R. 325.175(4), and MCL 333.2226(d)) which authorizes public health officers to “take actions and make determinations necessary or appropriate to carry out the local health department’s functions to protect the public health and prevent disease.”

“This was a necessary decision as we are seeing rapid increases in COVID-19 cases due to the highly contagious Delta variant,” said Dr. Adam London, Administrative Health Officer at the Kent County Health Department. “It also appears as though this variant may be more likely to cause serious illness and hospitalization, so we need to take precautions to keep our children healthy and in school.”

The Orders, which are identical but issued separately by jurisdiction, require the following:

- Educational institutions shall ensure that people in grades pre-kindergarten through six consistently and properly wear a facial covering (mask) while inside any closed building or structure.
- Educational institutions shall ensure that all persons, regardless of vaccination status, providing service to any persons in pre-kindergarten through grade six, properly and consistently wear a facial covering while inside any building or structure of the institution.

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“Vaccinations prevent most COVID-19 infections,” says Lisa Stefanovsky, Administrative Health Officer at the Ottawa County Department of Public Health. “However, many of our students are too young to be vaccinated so our Order seeks to protect them and slow the transmission of the coronavirus in our schools and community.”

The Orders further define the terms of educational institutions, fully vaccinated persons, and persons in educational settings.

Exceptions to these orders include:

1. Persons in the act of eating or drinking.
2. Persons under the age of four years; however, supervised masking is recommended for children who are at least two years of age.
3. Persons with developmental conditions of any age attending school for whom it has been demonstrated that the use of a face covering would inhibit the person's access to education. These are limited to persons with an Individualized Education Plan, Section 504 Plan, Individualized Healthcare Plan or equivalent.
4. Vaccinated teachers who are working with children who are hard of hearing or students with developmental conditions who benefit from facial cues.
5. Persons who have a medical reason confirmed in writing from a Medical Doctor (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) currently licensed to practice medicine in the State of Michigan.

“We are keenly aware of the negative impact of school closures on students, teachers and families,” London and Stefanovsky concluded. “We cannot afford another disrupted school year, so we all need to do our part to make sure that everyone remains healthy. This means getting a vaccine if you are eligible and wearing a mask indoors.”

The respective orders are effective immediately and will remain in effect until 60 days past the date COVID-19 vaccine is authorized or approved by the Food and Drug Administration and available to persons in pre-kindergarten through grade six, or community transmission for Kent and Ottawa counties are respectively categorized as “Low” by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for at least seven consecutive days, or until further notice from the Administrative Health Officer.

The wearing of face masks in schools is supported by Holland Hospital, Kent Intermediate School District, Mercy Health Saint Mary’s, Metro Health – University of Michigan Health, North Ottawa Community Health System, and Spectrum Health as important for protecting the health of our community.

While this order only pertains to mask use relative to the younger students and service providers, the Kent and Ottawa County health departments strongly recommend school administrators, teachers and parents closely adhere to the full guidelines from the [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and the local health departments.

The Kent County Health Department Public Health Order can be found [here](#), and the Ottawa County Department of Public Health Order can be found [here](#). A Spanish version

of the Kent County order will be posted to <https://www.accesskent.com/Health/covid-19-public-orders.htm> when available.

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