



July 30, 2021

Back to School Recommendations - Safety and Personal Responsibility

Greetings parents, students, and staff:

Welcome to the 2021-2022 school year! The Back to School Event held on Wednesday was awesome! Thank you for braving the heat to participate in the event. Very well attended!

On July 27, 2021, the Community Wellness Committee met with district officials to evaluate the latest guidance concerning the opening of school. Rising COVID rates, the unavailability of vaccines for younger students, and the American Academy of Pediatrics' recent call for universal masking led to the discussion for Page Unified. Dr. Hu, Tuba City Health Care, presented information to the group as well. Our top priority is the health and well-being of students and staff. Recommendations from health authorities and state laws related to masking and vaccines are causing concern and confusion about the mitigation measures that can be put into place.

Masking. HB2898 prohibits schools from requiring face coverings for students and staff during school hours and on school property to participate in in-person learning. CDC recommends indoor masking for vaccinated individuals in public indoor settings in areas of the country where there is substantial or high transmission as of July 27, 2021. Currently, all counties in Arizona except Yuma and Cochise meet this definition. Additionally, it **recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.**

Coconino County's community transmission classification is Moderate based on the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) Benchmarks. The incidence rate is Moderate at 85.5 per 100,000, percent positivity is Substantial at 11.6%, and COVID-Like Illness (CLI) is Minimal at 2.4%. The incidence rate has more than doubled in the last three weeks, and the percent positivity has moved into the Substantial category for the first time since February. The challenge remains for both vaccinated and unvaccinated students and staff.

To ensure a safe start to the school year, **layered prevention strategies** were identified for all schools. These layered strategies include a recommendation to wear a mask while indoors. **The two most important things we can do to help us keep each other safe this year is to get vaccinated when you are eligible and wear a mask indoors.** A consideration in making this decision is the ineligibility of children age 12 and younger to get vaccinated. "Ninety percent of the cases in July were in unvaccinated individuals, 99% of the deaths since January have been in unvaccinated individuals. We highly encourage everyone to get fully vaccinated." (KTAR)

Robert Candelaria President	Desiree Fowler Clerk	Governing Board Sandra K. Kidman Member	Dee McKerry Member	Charles Weiss Member
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Larry E. Wallen, Superintendent ♦ Page Unified School District #8
P.O. Box 1927 ♦ Page, AZ 86040
OFFICE: 928-608-4117 ♦ FAX: 928-645-0067

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday updated its [Covid-19 schools' guidance](#) to emphasize in-person schooling is a priority in the fall, regardless of whether all mitigation measures can be implemented. As K-12 schools will have a mix of vaccinated and unvaccinated people, the agency says it's still necessary to layer strategies such as masking and physical distancing, and most importantly, vaccinations for everyone eligible -- people age 12 and older.

While the vaccinated can go without a mask, the agency recommends unvaccinated people over the age of 2 wear masks when indoors. In general, people don't need to wear masks outdoors, but in areas with high coronavirus transmission, people who aren't fully vaccinated may still want to wear them in some circumstances.

"Consistent and correct mask use by people who are not fully vaccinated is especially important indoors and in crowded settings, when physical distancing cannot be maintained," the CDC notes. "Based on local conditions -- for example, in a school where students aren't yet eligible for vaccines or in an area with high transmission -- schools can still opt to require universal masking, even for those who are vaccinated. And, the CDC says, "schools should still support vaccinated people who choose to wear a mask."

To this end, we are recommending universal indoor masking for all staff, students, and visitors to schools, regardless of vaccination status.

- If you have a known exposure to COVID and are fully vaccinated, you should still watch out for symptoms of COVID-19. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should get tested and stay home and away from others. Please get tested 5 days after exposure and wear a mask. If your test is negative, no quarantine is needed. If your test is positive, isolate at home for 10 days.
- If you have a known exposure to COVID and are not fully vaccinated, please quarantine. Please get tested 5 days after exposure and wear a mask. If your test is negative, your quarantine can end as early as Day 8. If your test is positive, isolate at home for 10 days.
- Parents, please conduct a daily symptom check and keep students home if they are ill.

We are committed to in-person instruction in the 2021-22 school year. If you need virtual instruction, we offer the Sage and Sand Academy as the choice for Page students. Currently, state law prohibits school districts from requiring students to wear a mask, **personal responsibility is the answer under these circumstances.**

Respectfully,



Larry E. Wallen
Superintendent

		Governing Board		
Robert Candelaria	Desiree Fowler	Sandra K. Kidman	Dee McKerry	Charles Weiss
President	Clerk	Member	Member	Member

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