

**STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT FOR THE EPS
COVID19 MITIGATION EFFORTS**
From Our Community Healthcare Partners

The following statements were provided to EPS by local medical professionals, many of them also parents of EPS students, as a show of support and encouragement for all of the school district's personnel, parents, and children as we work together to keep each member of the school community safe and healthy throughout the 2021-22 academic year. These are the voices we considered, along with other members of the science and medical fields, as we weighed the implementation of mitigation strategies, including social distancing, masking, and quarantines. We are immensely grateful for their insight and selfless service to Edmond citizens.

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COVID is a pandemic like none other. The State of Oklahoma is in the midst of yet another surge in positive cases and hospitalizations. Science tells us that the vaccine is safe and effective. However, due to a number of reasons, many individuals remain unvaccinated. Until the number of individuals that are vaccinated increases significantly, masking remains one of our most effective tools to limit the spread of the virus. COVID is a respiratory disease spread through respiratory droplets. Masks help reduce the spread of respiratory diseases and several studies have come out in support of masking as being both effective and safe. For many reasons, a masking mandate is necessary in order to keep our children in school and to keep them safe when they are there. I encourage you to move forward with a masking mandate for our children until we see the number of new cases and hospitalizations decrease dramatically. Thank you.

Chad Michael Smith, MD, FACOG
Chief Medical Office
Mercy Hospital Oklahoma City

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As a physician who lives in Edmond and has a child in Edmond Public Schools, I am strongly supportive of a mask mandate. Since many children in EPS are too young to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, and many who are eligible haven't received it, masks are one of the few effective ways to reduce the transmission of the virus. Case numbers in EPS are worse than last year, and the school year is just starting. We need to be able to keep our kids (and their parents) out of quarantine.

Karl R. Hansen, M.D., Ph.D.

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I ask that you implement a mask mandate for the safety of the children in the Edmond school district. The science is clear, and an educational entity should be clearly following the science rather than the politics. The safety of the children should be the most important issue. Pediatric hospital beds are scarce, and children are getting very sick with the delta variant. Children who are not vaccinated are particularly vulnerable.

In your job as role models for the children in your district, please require the children to wear their masks to protect themselves and others in their community - a true lesson in citizenship. One preventable hospitalization of a child due to covid is one too many. One preventable death of a child due to covid would be unbearable.

Amy B. Middleman, MD, MEd, MPH

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I am writing to ask that we come together to do the best for our children, our families, and our community. Our student and teacher safety must be our highest priority. Masking helps to prevent the spread of COVID in the close contact setting of classrooms. Currently universal classroom masking is our best defense to keep our children in school for this academic year. As a physician and a mother, I appreciate our teachers and learned the hard way last year that they are much more effective in teaching my three boys than I am. The delta variant is proving to be very dangerous—even to the

vaccinated.

LaTasha Craig, MD

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I hope this email finds you well and in good health during this time of COVID resurgence.

I am writing to give you my full endorsement as a currently practicing physician in support of an Edmond public schools mask mandate. Speaking as a physician and assistant professor, masking is all but common sense and the least we can do to reduce viral spread in our community while continuing to teach our young students.

Speaking as the father of a daughter in first grade, she has already had two COVID positive exposures at school (despite wearing her own mask) this year. Current policies are not compatible with in-person education for most students due to the quarantine time required after an exposure.

Please consider this a strong endorsement of universal masking policy at the public school level during times of high viral transmission in the community.

Blake Porter, MD

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My name is Tim Krous and I have been a pediatrician in Edmond for the past 20 years. I have several providers in my clinic and, together, we have a large patient population which gives us a very broad view of the spread of disease amongst kids in Edmond. It is very clear that masking of all people, kids and adults, is very effective at preventing the spread of Covid and other diseases. The prevention of the spread of Covid has been proven by many studies over the last year, and we have seen this in real time watching kids in school last year compared to this year.

Last year at the peak of Covid we saw virtually no spread student to student in the classroom. Almost every case of a student testing positive for Covid was a transmission from the parent to the student. Despite the student being in the classroom a number of days before knowing they were contagious, there were almost no instances of that student spreading Covid to a classmate. It seems clear that this was due to the students wearing masks. Incidentally, due to masking, we did not have any cases of flu during last school year. An unintended, but positive, consequence of masking. I have never seen the absence of flu in 20 years of practice.

Moving forward to this school year we have seen an explosion in the number of kids testing positive from exposure at school. The school year started on a Thursday. When Monday clinic opened we were inundated with sick kids who had been exposed in the 2 days school had been open. On that one day we had 10-15 positive PCR Covid tests and the primary spread was student to student. Also, an infected teacher on the first day of school infected at least 2 of my patients. These numbers have exploded in the last few weeks.

The difference from last year to this year is obvious - masks last year, none this year.

Because of the low exposure rates last year we were able to quickly test possible exposures and get them back to school as soon as possible. I am fortunate to have the ability to do PCR testing in my office and have a result in about 45 minutes. As of last week we lost the ability to run PCR tests in our office due to how many exposures are occurring at school. Our supplier cannot keep up with the demand we have. We are now back to sending swabs to DLO and waiting multiple days for a result.

The morale of our staff is once again very low due to the frustration of the spread of Covid. We as healthcare providers are doing everything we can to see every child in the clinic who needs attention due to Covid or all the other illnesses we see everyday. Much of my frustration is that we are doing our part as healthcare providers, but the schools are adopting policies which seem to have the intent of spreading Covid more easily.

Simply put, this is not rocket science. We have a very contagious virus with a variant that spreads more easily amongst kids. It is causing more disease in kids. The solution to minimize spread is SIMPLE. Wear a mask in school. Vaccinate teachers and age eligible students. The problem would be

gone within weeks and the students would have a normal school year without quarantine. The fact is kids don't care about wearing a mask. If the teacher asks their students to do this they will. Students look up to their teachers and will do what they are asked to do. We ask our patients 3 and up to wear a mask in the clinic and they never care. Students are not political which is what anti-masking has become.

Please do what is right and make mask wearing the norm. The kids will not care and you will see a huge benefit to the children by not only keeping them healthy but allowing them to have a normal school year. If I have two options, both which will make some people unhappy, I will always choose the option that will make things better for the students.

Sincerely,

Timothy Krous, MD
Edmond Pediatrics

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These are trying times and there is a lot of conflicting information being put out there for the public with regards to the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. There is so much conflicting information that it can often be difficult for the non-medical person to separate fact from fiction. That is why it is especially important that we listen to our medical and public health professionals to help guide us through this ongoing global pandemic. The one thing that we can all agree on is that our children deserve to have the opportunity to attend school in person within a safe environment. We have seen recently as schools have opened, the number of children contracting COVID-19 has surged. Although the likelihood of your child dying from COVID-19 is low, there is a 1 in 7 chance they will continue to have symptoms months after the respiratory disease has resolved. They also have the ability to further the spread of COVID-19 to family, friends, and the community as a whole. The best available evidence suggests that when groups of people are indoors and in close proximity that transmission of COVID-19 is significantly reduced when everyone is wearing a mask. I urge you to consider asking your child to wear a mask while at school. It is not only about keeping our children and family safe, but also about sending a statement to our children and neighbors that we care enough about one another that we are willing to endure some minor personal inconvenience if it means saving one life.

Daniel Freno, MD
Cardiothoracic Surgeon
Integris Cardiovascular Physicians

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I am writing in support of a mask mandate in our schools. Masks have been scientifically proven to significantly decrease the spread of COVID.

The delta variant is particularly scary as COVID now spreads easier and can make our children sick to the point of hospitalization.

Before the delta variant, I didn't worry as much about my kids, but now I do daily. Masking is an easy, effective intervention that is recommended by medical experts throughout the country.

I have asked my daughter to wear a mask at school and I think she does, but she also talks about the difficulty of standing out among many other kids who don't. No kid should feel "different" for keeping themselves safe.

A mask mandate would help keep more of our kids healthy and less of them in the hospital. Having seen patients in the hospital who are sick with COVID, I would do anything possible to spare our children the experience of fighting for oxygen.

Thank you for your consideration in keeping our kids safe.

Kate Arnold, MD and Caroline Flint, MD

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I'm a concerned parent of a child who attends Edmond Public Schools and I'm writing this note in strong support of a mask mandate. I trust that leaders can listen and learn from the health professionals who are speaking, urging people to wear masks and to vaccinate if able. Wearing masks is one of the most effective ways to prevent this respiratory transmitted virus. This is a health issue, not a political issue. As a mother of two young children, I urge you to please support a mask mandate. It is such a small action which can significantly impact the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Our kids deserve to be educated in a safe environment. Let's keep schools open and keep kids and teachers safe by enacting a masking mandate!!

Lieschen H. Quiroz, MD

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I am reaching out concerning the lack of masking in Edmond public schools. The CDC guidelines and American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines are clear that the current pandemic situation with COVID 19 requires masking for everyone under 2 years of age.

The science supports this for several reasons: 1) children 11 and under cannot be vaccinated, so I cannot yet protect my children by getting them vaccinated 2) with the Delta variant, vaccinated individuals can become ill with COVID 19 as well as spread it to others. This was not true with the previous strain.

We are seeing other states not requiring masking and there are reports of educators and students dying from COVID 19- what a tragic and preventable loss.

The courts in Texas as well as Florida have upheld challenges to governors who implemented executive orders that prevented mask mandates, so the legal precedent currently is that it is not legal for governors to issue such orders about masking.

It appears that Superintendent Hofmeister is supportive of schools having the autonomy to decide to keep our children safe. We should not be distracted by the actions of those who don't put our children first or who act in direct opposition to public health policies.

Thank you

Kellie R Jones, MD

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Contrary to the original COVID-19 strain last year, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) notes the delta variant is spread much more easily and is more than twice as contagious. The majority of all current COVID-19 cases are due to the Delta variant. Additionally, the delta variant causes much more severe illness than the original strain, even in children. The CDC also discusses that the greatest concern remains against those that are unvaccinated, such as our children who are not yet old enough to be vaccinated.

For those unable to be vaccinated, wearing a mask indoors reduces the emission of virus-laden droplets, which is especially important in people that are asymptomatic or presymptomatic, and are unaware of their infectiousness to others. This accounts for more than 50% of COVID-19 transmissions (1,2). To a degree, masks also help reduce inhalation of these droplets to the mask wearer. When the number of people who wear these masks increases, particularly unvaccinated (such as our children), data shows a decrease in community viral spread.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) also endorses that Children ages 2 years and older can and should wear cloth face coverings when not able to physically distance, including while in schools... "according to AAP interim guidance (3). "Cloth face coverings can be safely worn by all children 2 years of age and older, including the vast majority of children with underlying health conditions, with rare exception." Dr. Sara Goza, M.D. (AAP President), recently stated that "this virus is going to be with us for some time, and face coverings are a proven, effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19." "As parents prepare to send their children to school and into child care settings, cloth face coverings should be a part of their new normal."

Research supports that multi-layer cloth masks can block up to 80% of fine droplets and particles that

are released in aerosolized droplets upon coughing, sneezing, singing, talking, or even breathing (4), and in some studies perform on par with surgical masks as barriers (5-7)

M. Blake Evans, DO, FACOG

1. Moghadas SM, Fitzpatrick MC, Sah P, et al. The implications of silent transmission for the control of COVID-19 outbreaks. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. Jul 28 2020;117(30):17513-17515. doi:10.1073/pnas.2008373117
2. Johansson MA, Quandelacy TM, Kada S, et al. SARS-CoV-2 Transmission From People Without COVID-19 Symptoms. JAMA Netw Open. Jan 4 2021;4(1):e2035057. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.35057
3. <https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/cloth-face-coverings/>
4. Leung NHL, Chu DKW, Shiu EYC, et al. Respiratory virus shedding in exhaled breath and efficacy of face masks. Nature medicine. Apr 03 2020;26(5):676-680. doi:<https://dx.doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0843-2>
5. Lindsley WG, Blachere FM, Law BF, Beezhold DH, Noti JD. Efficacy of face masks, neck gaiters and face shields for reducing the expulsion of simulated cough-generated aerosols. Aerosol Sci Technol. 2020; in press
6. Bandiera L., Pavar G., Pisetta G., et al. Face coverings and respiratory tract droplet dispersion. medRxiv. 2020;doi:10.1101/2020.08.11.20145086
7. Ueki H, Furusawa Y, Iwatsuki-Horimoto K, et al. Effectiveness of Face Masks in Preventing Airborne Transmission of SARS-CoV-2. mSphere. Oct 21 2020;5(5)doi:10.1128/mSphere.00637-20

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Historically, vaccines have been one of the best ways to curb the spread of communicable diseases. We all benefit today from the vast majority of individuals getting the measles vaccine, the polio vaccine, the mumps vaccine, the chicken pox vaccine, the tetanus vaccine, and the whooping cough vaccine. By getting vaccines, our society doesn't have to fight those diseases on a daily basis with large groups of people being sick all the time. But it can also blind us to how deadly those diseases were and still can be without a vaccine. We have an opportunity to make a difference in the spread of COVID by getting the vaccine. And by using all of the known precautions like hand washing, staying away from others when coughing, and by wearing a mask. These are simple steps, but important ones, yielding the greatest benefit to ourselves, to those we love, and to society.

Alice Mankin, MD MS

Chair, Department of Primary Care
Mercy Clinic—West Community

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To the Citizens of Edmond:

I am in full support of ALL efforts to mitigate the effects of COVID19. As a mother who has children in Edmond Public Schools, I am greatly concerned about transmission within the school setting. As an Infectious Diseases physician, I understand the science of this virus and have seen the devastating effects of this virus first hand. While I have seen patients die from all types of illnesses, death from COVID19 is especially sad for the medical providers and frightening for the patients. Due to the infectious nature of COVID19, these patients are kept in strict isolation, meaning they often die without a family member present.

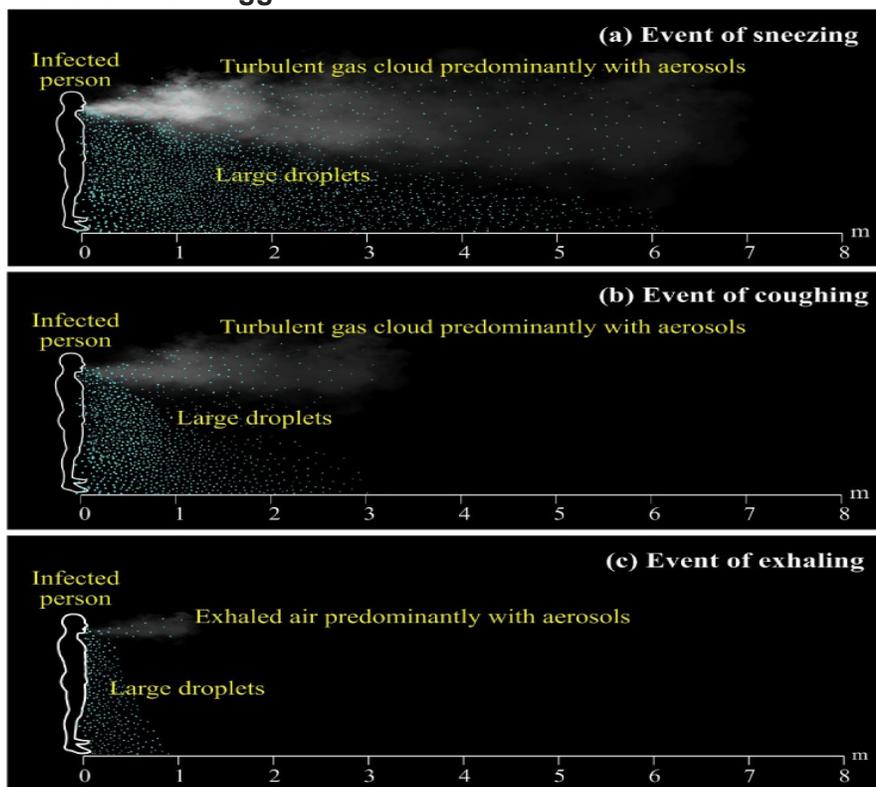
Oklahoma County has documented 99,695 cases with 1356 deaths since the beginning of this pandemic - the highest number of cases among OK counties. Edmond has documented 20,568 cases with 196 deaths -the 3rd highest number of cases among OK cities (<https://oklahoma.gov/covid19.html> accessed 9/1/2021). With the development of the delta variant of the COVID19, our case numbers in

the state have once again risen to the levels seen in late Fall 2020. A full 11.91% of the cases are among children aged 5 -17 years (<https://oklahoma.gov/covid19.html> accessed 9/1/2021). There is increasing concern that children, who had mostly been spared from symptomatic COVID19 early in the pandemic, especially those too young to be vaccinated, are being infected at higher numbers with more severe disease (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/09/health/coronavirus-children-delta.html> accessed 9/1/2021).

We know this virus is spread through aerosol generation. The delta variant of COVID19 is at least twice as infectious through this route as previous strains. Infected persons have higher amounts of virus in their noses and carry it for a longer period of time (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/delta-variant.html?s_cid=11512:delta%20variant%20of%20covid.sem.ga.p:RG:GM:gen:PTN:FY21 accessed 9/1/2021). Modelling of aerosol generation in a lab shows how easily this virus spreads, even in the act of exhalation (see illustration below).

With all of this information, I support masking for ALL students and staff at ALL Edmond Public Schools as one of the efforts to stop the spread of COVID19 within our community.

Michelle R. Salvaggio MD



(<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32569870/> accessed 9/1/2021).

An article and video from OU Children's Hospital

<https://www.publicradiotulsa.org/post/ou-pediatricians-encourage-masks-vaccinations-ahead-back-school#stream/0>

<https://www.oklahoman.com/videos/news/healthcare/2021/08/13/pediatricians-reinforce-importance-masking-and-vaccination/8118922002/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJx04Z4iV9E>