Mask advocacy letter from Physicians and APPs for Livingston County Schools

August 26, 2021

Dear Livingston County Health Department (LCHD) and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS):

We are writing you as Physicians and Advanced Practice Providers who live in, work in, and/or provide health care for residents of Livingston County in public support for Livingston County Health Department and MDHHS to mandate universal masking for children in schools this fall. Universal masking in schools is consistent with the recommendations of the Livingston County Health Department (1), CDC (2), MDHHS (3), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (4), Michigan Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (5), and Michigan Academy of Family Physicians (6) all who recommend universal masking in schools along with other layered protection strategies to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 virus in schools.

At the time of writing this letter, there are no school districts in Livingston County that are implementing universal masking policies throughout their district like you have recommended they do as part of the layered protection strategies, and at least one of the districts in the county has actively taken a vote by the school board to not implement universal masking policies (Brighton).

We know that universal masking, combined with the layered protection strategies detailed by the CDC, help keep kids more safely in schools during this pandemic. Mask wearing is most effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19 if both the infectious individual and the exposed individual are wearing masks. (7) It is imperative that the schools follow the CDC, MDHHS, and LCHD recommendations regarding universal mask use now as the delta variant of COVID-19 is causing a surge of COVID-19 cases across the country and in Michigan. The delta variant is more than twice as contagious compared to the previous strain circulating last school year, cases in Michigan are growing at similar rates to states that have had Delta surges, and Michigan hospitalizations increased for all age groups this past week. (8,9) Children younger than 12 are a particularly vulnerable population as they do not have access to the COVID-19 vaccine yet. When children are infected with the COVID-19 virus, even if they have few to no symptoms, they can develop a number of other conditions after the COVID infection including respiratory problems, myocarditis and other cardiac conditions, loss of smell and taste, developmental issues, mental fatigue making learning more difficult, physical fatigue, headaches, mental health effects, MIS-C, and “long haul COVID-19.” (10)

Livingston County is currently classified by the CDC as “High” Level of Community Transmission of COVID-19, the highest ranking they have. (11) Many school districts and/or counties in the area around Livingston county have implemented some level of policy around universal masking in schools. According to the CDC data for the 7-day total case rates per county through August 24th, 2021 (11), Livingston County had the highest case rate of all its surrounding counties:

Livingston County: 201.05 cases per 100,000

Jackson County: 166.55 cases per 100,000

Shiawasee County: 146.80 cases per 100,000

Genesee County: 123.21 cases per 100,000

Oakland County: 114.11 cases per 100,000

Washtenaw County: 107.18 cases per 100,000

Ingham County: 88.23 cases per 100,000

Of note, Genesee County and Oakland County health departments have recently announced universal masking policies for schools in their counties, while they have lower case rates than we have in Livingston County.

We, as health professionals, care deeply about the health of Livingston County school children, educational staff and the entire community. Please help us to care for this community by mandating universal masking outlined by all the above organizations to support the health of children.

Sincerely,

Livingston County area physicians and advanced practice providers as signed below:

We, as the undersigned, are signing as individuals; any affiliations listed are for identification purposes only and do not imply endorsement by the institution

Raymond Smith, MD Family Medicine

Rebecca Smith, MD Psychiatry

Maria DeLeon, DO, MPH, FAAP

Kara Mizokami-Stout, MD

Eva Osilla, DO, family medicine

Lisa Bosio NP-C

Alanna Nzoma MD, Pediatrics

Julia DePorre, MD

Anna Laurie, MD Family Medicine, Michigan Medicine

Kathryn Lemon, PA-C

Farah Daneshvar, DO

Mary Khunger, MD, FAAP, Pediatrician

Jessica Lofgren, DO Infectious Disease Physician

Jacquelynn Hatch, DO

Andrew Admon, MD, MPH, MS, Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine

Julia Madison-Williams MD, General Pediatrics, University of Michigan

Ricardo Cabrera MD Board certified Family Physician

Katie Zurek, MD, Family Practice

Donna Vorias, MD

Rodney Dewyer, MD

Stephanie Goodson M.D. Michigan Medicine Pediatrics

Yu Kuei Lin, MD University of Michigan

Vidooshi Maru, MD

Lynn Gessner MD

Shanti Rao M.D. Michigan Medicine, Brighton Heath Center

Kao-Ping Chua, MD, PhD, Department of Pediatrics, University of Michigan Medical School

Eleni Scott, MD

Judy Tosto, MD

Susannah Parke, DO

Martha Richard-Smolarek, DNP, APRN-BC

La Donna Hendricks-Sparrow, MD

Janet Hubert MD

Amanda Stolen NP-C

Denise M. Lippitt, MD, FAAP

Julie Byrne FNP-BC, Pediatrics

Katelyn D'Onofrio NP-C

Dulcimer Albers RN PA

Tim McInnis RN NP

Farhan Bhatti, MD

Rebecca Pawlik, MD

Christopher Nall, MD

Donya Hosseinian MD

Nancy Carbajo MD

Carranda Koop MD, Internal Medicine

Melissa J Zimmerman MD

Kristine Cece MD PhD, Family Medicine

Andrew Cunningham, MD, Family Medicine

Rebecca Tostige Ruthberg, MD

Ravnit Dhillon, MD

Simin Emadzadeh, MD

Bassel Atasi, MD Internal Medicine and Pediatrics

Heba Abu-Isa, MD Clinical instructor or general pediatrics, Michigan Medicine

Michael Tupper MD

In addition to the signatures noted above of physicians and advanced practice providers, the following individuals in other areas of health professions wished to sign the letter in support of the advocacy.

Amy Crittenden, RPh, PharmD

Crystal Ward RN

Robyn Bergmans Au.D.

Cindy Alexander LPN COVID testing

Rory Balan RN

Bethany McConell RN

Katie Deck, RN, BSN Mott Children’s Hospital

Alyssa Romanowski RN

Amy Herrema RN, BSN

Lindsey McEuen, RN

Reference Links

(1) https://www.livgov.com/health/ph/Documents/LCHD-K12-Infection-Prevention-Guidance-2021.pdf

(2) https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html

(3) COVID-19\_Guidance\_for\_Operating\_Schools\_Safely\_728838\_7.pdf (michigan.gov)

(4)https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/

(5) https://www.miaap.org/news

(6) https://www.mafp.com/news/michigan-family-physicians-urge-mask-requirements-in-michigan-schools-this-fall

(7) https://emilysmith.substack.com/p/schools-and-churches-heres-the-data

(8) https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/delta-variant.html

(9)https://www.michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/20210823\_Data\_and\_modeling\_update\_vFINAL\_733760\_7.pdf

(10) https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Post-COVID-Conditions-in-Children-and-Teens.aspx

(11) https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view