



Public Information Release

Schools Moving to Hybrid after Thanksgiving November 12, 2020

For six consecutive weeks Madison County has been Level 3 (red) on the Ohio Public Health Advisory System (OPHAS). Additionally, Madison County has experienced “high incidence” of COVID-19 cases on the OPHAS for seven consecutive weeks. Madison County Health Commissioner Chris Cook is concerned about the sustained trend he is seeing in cases. “We are currently averaging 55 new cases of COVID-19 each week and we are on an increasing trend. This is not sustainable,” Cook said. The high incidence threshold for a county the size of Madison is 22 new cases per week and the definition of a “controlled pandemic” is adding 11 new cases per week. Cases continue to increase in the county and across Ohio as the winter holiday season approaches. Cook said he is worried about what lies ahead for January. “With no recovery time between holidays, I am deeply concerned about an amplification effect of COVID-19 spread that will sicken hundreds of residents, push our healthcare system to the limit, and cause tragic and unnecessary loss of life. If we don’t take action now, this is what will happen.”

Since October 1, half of all new COVID-19 cases in Madison County have been students, school staff, or people who live with or had exposure to students in the two weeks prior to the onset of illness. Beginning November 30, all schools in Madison County will switch to their hybrid/blended plan for educational delivery. According to Cook, hybrid plans put more distance between students, reduce the overall number of people in the building each day, and reduce overall exposures in the school setting to help slow the spread everywhere. “Every Madison County school district has put forth exceptional effort to prepare for what school will be like during a pandemic. They created plans for hybrid and virtual learning. Now is the time to use those hybrid plans.”

School sports will continue to be regulated by the Ohio Department of Health and Governor DeWine’s office. Commissioner Cook said schools and parents should plan on a hybrid learning model until at least February 5, 2021. “I monitor the impact of COVID-19 on our county daily and will remain flexible if trends significantly change,” he said. But those trends could go either way. Cook said he has also advised schools to ensure their remote learning plans are ready to be used if needed.

Since the early summer public health officials have been cautious with schools as they affect the health of the entire community. “At the end of the day, every person leaves school and goes home to loved ones. They take with them every microscopic interaction of the day,” Cook said. Studies estimate that more than 40% of students may be asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19. People can also spread COVID-19 to others two days before they show even the first symptom. “There are silent spreaders all around us. Everyone needs to wear a mask, put more distance between them, and stop gathering together. Anything less isn’t acceptable right now,” Cook said.

Cook recognized the efforts of schools and parents and knows there are social and emotional aspects to the pandemic as well. “Parents and schools have been asked to do so much this year. This is not easy on anyone. But we have more work to do here in Madison County.”

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