

FLOYD COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT



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Dear Concerned Community Partner,

COVID-19 has previously demonstrated an ability to disrupt back to school plans. Once again, the Pandemic environment is changing just as school resumes.

Last week, US cases, deaths, and hospitalizations all rose, fueled by the BA.5 strain of Omicron. This variant of the Covid virus is becoming the dominant type, currently responsible for 78 % of new cases. BA.5 appears at least as infectious as the earlier Omicron strain but more severe in the general course of illness.

Currently, Community levels are at medium or high in 75% of US Counties. The Floyd County level, assigned by CDC, is **HIGH/ORANGE**, representing the highest category of community transmission. *During HIGH category status the CDC recommends wearing a mask indoors and on public transportation, updating your vaccine status, getting promptly tested if symptomatic, and taking additional precautions if in a high-risk group.*

There are several factors driving the increasing number of cases in our community. 65% of our citizens have had at least one dose of vaccine, and 58.4% completed the primary series. Unfortunately, only 34% of people who are eligible for the booster dose have elected to receive it. Waning antibody levels are a real concern with the new more virulent strain, as is the unvaccinated state of roughly 28,000 people in Floyd County. Importantly, the immunizations available now are still effective in preventing and lowering the severity of Covid-19.

Indiana is ranked 33rd in pediatric Covid vaccination in the US.

Current evidence indicates that children with special health care needs from genetic, neurologic, and metabolic conditions such as Epilepsy, Asthma and Diabetes are at higher risk for severe Covid-19 infection. In fact, Covid itself

appears to be a risk factor for the development of Type 1 Diabetes, as new onset diabetic cases are 2.5 times more likely to have had Covid within 30 days of onset. Only 3% of the 6 month to 5 year old age group are vaccinated for Covid in Indiana. The rate for 5 to 11 years old is 36%. The figure for 12 to 17 improves to 69%.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, Center for Disease Control, American Academy of Family Practice, and American College of Emergency Medicine all recommend Covid-19 immunization for **all children 6 months and older who do not have a contraindication**. Advice given by some primary care providers, including pediatricians, to avoid Covid vaccination is definitely not supported by evidence or consensus. Indeed, recommending children not be vaccinated is a fringe position and simply not best practice.

Since the full impact of the BA.5 strain is still unclear, The Floyd County Health department is encouraging educators and managers to discuss mitigation measures, including mask use and social distancing, as a part of the Fall operational planning. We are also encouraging schools and employers to include materials supporting vaccination in Back-to-School events and information.

Rates of Covid illness respond best when everyone works together and takes advantage of Public Health opportunities. We are encouraging the leaders, educators, and managers of Floyd County to assist in the continuing effort to fight this troublesome disease.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Th Harris MD". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Thomas M. Harris, MD, FACEP
Floyd County Health Officer