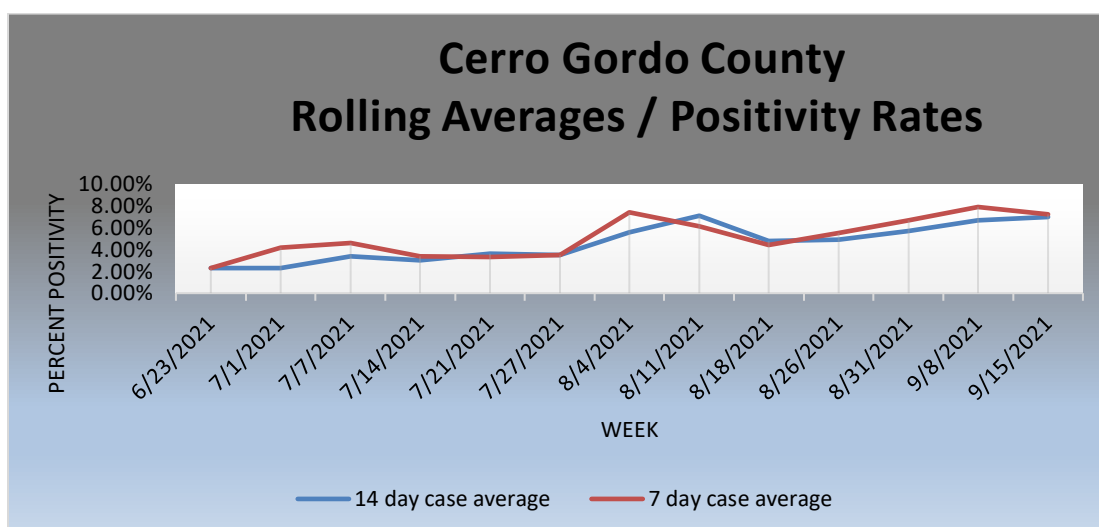


September 17, 2021

To: Cerro Gordo County School Administration, Staff, Students and Parents

We thank you for all your hard work and due diligence while we continue to counter the COVID19 pandemic. We recognize the continued stress and confusion, especially when it comes to responding to COVID19 in the school setting. As you work through the process in deciding whether to reinstate the mask mandate, please consider the following items:

- **Mask Effectiveness** – masks are effective. The main purpose of wearing a mask is to serve as a barrier to help contain a person’s respiratory droplets from reaching others when they cough, sneeze, talk, shout or sing, especially if the wearer is COVID19 positive. The mask reduces the spray of droplets when worn over the nose and mouth. A mask offers the wearer some protection also from breathing in the virus. This mitigation strategy works best if most people are wearing masks.
- **Asymptomatic Carriers** – studies have found people with COVID19 who never develop symptoms (or are not yet showing symptoms) can still spread the virus to other people. Wearing a mask helps protect those around that person by acting as a barrier for infected droplets.
- **Expert Recommendations** - universal mask mandates at schools are recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).
- **Current COVID19 Activity**- The entire State of Iowa is currently in a **High** level of community transmission ([https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations-county-view|Iowa|19033|Risk|community\\_transmission\\_level](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations-county-view|Iowa|19033|Risk|community_transmission_level))
  - In addition, increased COVID19 positivity rates in Cerro Gordo County continue





- **Population Impacted** - children comprise the largest group of COVID19 positive tests as shown by the data below. Below are the current rates (percent of cases/positive tests or whatever it is by age). This has been consistent since the start of the school year.
  - Persons 0-17 years of age: 33%
  - Persons 18-29 years of age: 13%
  - Persons 30-39 years of age: 12%
  - Persons 40-49 years of age: 10%
  - Persons 50-59 years of age: 11%
  - Persons 60-69 years of age: 10%
  - Persons 70-79 years of age: 10%
  - Persons 80+ years of age: 1%
- **COVID19 Vaccination Rates** - current COVID19 vaccination rates in Cerro Gordo County for children and youth remains low:
  - Students 0-11 years of age: 0%
  - Students 12-15 years of age: 36.0%
  - Students 16-17 years of age: 39.6%
  - Students 18-19 years of age: 43.4%
- **Flattening the Curve** – utilizing mitigation efforts such as universal masks in the school setting slows the spread of COVID19 throughout our entire community. This allows for our hospitals and clinics to adequately respond to those in need of care- whether it's for COVID19, a heart attack, a motor vehicle accident, elective surgeries, broken bone, or infectious diseases like strep throat or influenza.
- **Past Experience** - last year's universal masking worked. Transmission within the school setting was rare and it helped keep children in school and parents at work.
- **Current Legal Interpretation** - instituting universal masking keeps schools in compliance with the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act expectations.

In closing, we support the CDC and AAP recommendations for universal mask mandate within the school setting as it is the best public health practice. The 2020/2021 school year taught us why mask usage is important to keep kids in the classroom where they learn best. It is also important to note that when kids are in school, parents can be at work. We are here to help you gain access to or interpret data, clarify guidance or answer any questions you have.

Respectfully,

Brian Hanft, MPA, REHS, DAAS  
Director of Public Health  
Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health