

COVID-19 Report and Discussion

COVID Numbers Continue to Climb

As of Tuesday, July 14, 2020, the number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Wright County has climbed to 403. Wright County now ranks fifth in terms of per capita cases in the State of Iowa behind Buena Vista (Storm Lake), Crawford (Denison), Louisa (Columbus Junction), and Woodbury (Sioux City).

State Directive: Schools Reopened on July 1

On Thursday, June 25, Governor Reynolds and the Director of the Department of Education Ann Lebo caught the entire education community in the state off guard when they announced schools are open for business as of July 1.

We were eagerly looking forward to guidance from the state that it promised would be given to us around July 1, but when it arrived, there was hardly any guidance at all. Schools are simply open to everyone with all decisions transferred to local authority. The state guidance simply stated, "Beginning July 1, school districts and accredited nonpublic schools may begin offering all school activities." Schools are expected to serve all students full-time on a daily basis when classes resume in August.

Schools are not to screen students and staff as they enter the buildings. Face coverings should not be required. Schools are not expected to provide physical distancing throughout the school day, during school activities, or with transportation. However, we are expected to post signs on how to stop the spread of illness, properly wash hands, and promote everyday protective measures.

Issues to Consider

- 1) The student activity immediately affected by the reopening of schools is the school weight room. Our football coach is eager to get his team into the weight room.
- 2) Our eSports team members would like to re-enter the school to use our computers to practice.
- 3) Prom is tentatively scheduled for August 2.
- 4) Summer school in Jacobson Elementary is tentatively scheduled to start on Monday, July 29, and run for two weeks through Friday, August 7.
- 5) Fall sports are scheduled to commence practices with both football and volleyball starting on Monday, August 10.
- 6) Next, classes are set to resume on Monday, August 24.
- 7) Finally, we may anticipate a full gymnasium when volleyball opens its season August 24.

Public Statement on the Resumption of School on August 24

Disclaimer: This statement is not for public release at this time. It is presented here for school board review only.

Friday, July 17, 2020

The following is a joint statement by Wright County Public Health, Iowa Specialty Hospitals and Clinics, and the three Wright County public schools: Belmond-Klemme, Clarion-Goldfield-Dows, and Eagle Grove.

As of the publication of this notice today, the Belmond-Klemme Community School District is planning for all students and staff to return to full days of classes beginning on the first day of school, Monday, August 24, 2020.

We recognize returning to school in the midst of a global pandemic emergency is a very serious issue. As of July 8, 2020, the number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Wright County had climbed to 389. Wright County now ranks fifth in terms of per capita cases in the State of Iowa behind Buena Vista (Storm Lake), Crawford (Denison), Louisa (Columbus Junction), and Woodbury (Sioux City).

Our Wright County Decision

Governor Reynolds turned school decisions over to the individual counties on June 25. Shortly thereafter, the three Wright County school districts resolved to work together as a single unit in determining how our schools will operate under the circumstances of the pandemic. We are working directly and extensively with Wright County Public Health and Iowa Specialty Hospitals and Clinics.

It is the unanimous consensus of Wright County Public Health, Iowa Specialty Hospitals and Clinics, and the three Wright County public schools that all schools should restart for all students in classrooms on a daily basis beginning with the new school year.

With this knowledge and understanding, we are proceeding according to the recommendations at this time of the experts and based upon the science of the virus outbreak. A safe reopening will be paramount in our efforts.

Following the Experts

At this time, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is urging schools to resume for all students at the first available opportunity. The AAP "strongly advocates that all policy

considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.”

The AAP advises it is imperative for the health of children to re-open schools. They recognize the decision must be “balanced with the known harms to children, adolescents, families, and the community by keeping children at home.” Many children who are isolated at home are facing risks from abuse and social isolation. Moreover, we believe in-person education is superior in quality of instruction for the vast majority of students.

The Spread of the COVID-19 Virus

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “the virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about six feet), and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.”

The science of the virus tells us that children and adolescents are less likely to be symptomatic and less likely to have severe infection. In addition, children may be less likely to become infected and to spread infection.

The initial cancellation of schools was done because of evidence that schools are a major contributor to the spread of other infections, such as influenza. After more experience with COVID-19, it is now clear that children are at dramatically lower risk of severe illness from COVID-19 than adults.

It is difficult to predict what contribution children and schools may have in spreading COVID-19 between adults, since nearly all schools in the country have been closed. However, there is some indication that children (particularly young children) are less likely to spread COVID-19. Prevention measures within the school are likely to decrease this risk even further.

Face coverings will be essential.

What we do know of the COVID-19 virus is that it is primarily transmitted by respiratory droplets and our best protective measure around other people is a face covering or mask.

There is now strong evidence from scientific studies and from our own local experience that widespread adoption of face coverings can dramatically reduce the spread of COVID-19 from people who are infected and are asymptomatic or become symptomatic while near others. As a close-to-home example, Iowa Specialty Hospital has had multiple employees develop symptoms of COVID-19 while at work. Follow-up testing of patients and other staff who had close contact with these individuals has not revealed any transmission in this setting where everyone is wearing masks.

When school resumes in August, I believe all faculty and staff should be required to wear masks while in our buildings. Reusable masks have been ordered and will be distributed in August.

I believe all students should be strongly encouraged to wear masks while in our buildings. All students on buses should have masks, and I am ordering face shields for all students in grades PK through 3.

I ask the school board to weigh-in on my recommendations.

The most significant way that we can ensure school is able to proceed safely is decreasing the number of infections in our community. This requires the assistance of all families starting now. Reducing non-essential activities, social distancing, and the use of either face shields or face masks when in close contact with others are the main tools available to decrease spread of COVID-19. Widespread implementation of these measures now will help increase the chances of success for the upcoming school year.

Physical Distancing Measures

The CDC recommends that schools “space seating/desks at least six feet apart when feasible.” However, our school—and for most other public schools—six feet is not feasible without limiting the number of students.

The AAP tells us that three feet of physical distance can be just as effective when students are wearing masks. The AAP states, “Evidence suggests that spacing as close as three feet may approach the benefits of six feet of space, particularly if students are wearing face coverings and are asymptomatic.”

The AAP also states, “Strict adherence to a specific size of student groups (e.g., 10 per classroom, 15 per classroom, etc.) should be discouraged in favor of other risk mitigation strategies.”

Other Considerations

Now that we have a sense of direction and know that students will be back in school full-time, we can begin to finalize other details of the school day. We have many details to address, such as how we can best transport our students on our fleet of school buses.

Another logistic to work out is how we will handle school lunches. Our tentative plan is to serve students individually plated meals or in boxed lunches in their classrooms instead of in a communal cafeteria, while ensuring the safety of children with food allergies. We will likely utilize disposable food service items (e.g., utensils, dishes).

Further information will be released soon.

Preparation for Possible Contingencies

There are five potential scenarios for classes throughout the coming school year. They are described in the box below:

Health Condition:

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| HealthCon 5: | This is our normal state of readiness. |
| HealthCon 4: | All students attend. We take the precautions we take during an influenza outbreak with social distancing maximized with the use masks. |
| HealthCon 3: | We operate with a hybrid model with some students attending and others remaining home and participating through remote learning. |
| HealthCon 2: | Students remain home; teachers come to school daily. Classes continue through remote learning. |
| HealthCon 1: | All classes are cancelled. School is made up at a later date. |