

UPSTATE

MEDICAL UNIVERSITY

August 11, 2021

To: Central New York School Superintendents

In a few weeks, children all over Central New York will return to school. As pediatricians, infectious disease physicians, and public health experts from Upstate Medical University and the community, our goal is to ensure that all children can safely return to school in person, full time, and participate in after school activities and sports. We advocate to minimize the risk for COVID-19 infection and exposure at school which requires lengthy isolation or quarantine, respectively. A safe in-person school attendance is predicated on a **universal masking policy for all children and staff**. Our recommendations are based on the best medical advice and scientific research available.

What We know:

Delta is the predominant SARS-CoV-2 variant. Delta is **more transmissible** and possibly causes more serious disease compared to the original virus and its new variants. Data indicate that the Delta variant is 40 to 60 percent more transmissible than Alpha and almost twice as transmissible as the original SARS-CoV-2 virus. As an example, Delta variant is more contagious than other viruses like Ebola, common cold, flu, and smallpox.

Delta led to a surge in hospitalization and death among unvaccinated. Currently, more than 97 percent of COVID-19 patients in intensive care units or patients dying from COVID-19 are infected with the Delta variant. To make things worse, younger adults and now children are being hospitalized in greater numbers. Many children are not eligible for vaccination given their age. They are particularly susceptible to infection unless they are protected by mask. In addition, control and prevention protocol are important: hand washing, not attending school when sick, keeping physical distance, and staying in well ventilated areas whenever possible.

The Delta variant puts **everyone at increased risk**. Those who have been vaccinated are still protected against moderate and serious illness and death. However, protection is not 100 percent. **Vaccinated people can still get infected and be contagious to others**, particularly if they are unmasked and in poorly ventilated and crowded settings. **Unvaccinated people are at risk for severe disease, hospitalization, and death**. They also remain the main driver of COVID-19 in the communities around them. Vaccination with COVID vaccine is the best way to prevent serious COVID-19 and stop the spread of the virus. Unfortunately, children under the age of 12

years are not eligible for vaccination, making **universal masking crucial** to control the spread of SARS-CoV-2 infection.

What we recommend to stay safe:

Masking is a proven way to keep children safe from COVID-19, especially when children are indoors at school. There is abundant evidence that shows masking protects children and adults from COVID-19, including the Delta variant. It is recommended by the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Public Health Association, as well as most respected medical organizations.

We all are part of this community and we care deeply about the health of our neighbors, our patients, and all children. We recognize the importance of in person education and social interactions for children. Safe return to school must be coupled with universal masking to avoid school closures, and exclusion of exposed or infected children. The cost of COVID-19 infection and stress associated with testing of children cannot be underestimated, and should be carefully considered as schools are finalizing their masking policies. **Masked children are less likely to be exposed, and less likely to require testing.** They are also less likely to be infected, and require isolation and exclusion from school. Our unequivocal recommendation is for every school district to institute universal mask wearing requirement for children and staff. Masking in schools will help keep our children and our community safe.

***Kathryn Anderson, MD, PhD**, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Hospitalist/Epidemiologist, Upstate Medical University

***Winter Berry, DO**, Associate Professor General Pediatrics Upstate Medical University; President, American Academy of Pediatrics New York Chapter 1

***Steven Blatt, MD**, Professor of Pediatrics, General Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University; Co-President, Pediatric Society of Central New York

***Gregory Connors, MD MPH MBA**, Chair, Department of Pediatrics, & Executive Director, Golisano Children's Hospital, Upstate Medical University

***Barbara Anne Morisseau, MD**, Brighton Hill Pediatrics; Co-President, Pediatric Society of Central New York

***Christopher Morley PhD**, Professor & Chair, Public Health & Preventive Medicine, Upstate Medical University

***Jana Shaw, MD, MPH**, Professor, Pediatric Infectious Disease, Golisano Children's Hospital Epidemiologist, Upstate Medical University

***Telisa Stewart, DrPH**, Associate Professor, Public Health & Preventive Medicine, Upstate Medical University

***Stephen Thomas, MD**, Professor of Medicine & Interim Chair, Microbiology & Immunology and Infectious Disease Physician, Upstate Medical University

*Authors

The signatures below were added after August 13:

Mitchell Brodey, MD, Clinical Professor of Medicine, Upstate Medical University

Janet Elizabeth Hobson, MD, Assistant professor of Pediatrics

Jennifer Myszewski, DO, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Pediatric Hospitalist, Upstate Medical University

Stephen Mintz, MD, Pediatrician, Brighton Hill Pediatrics, Retired

Neal Seidberg, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University and Golisano Children's Hospital

Manika Suryadevara, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Pediatric Infectious Disease Upstate Medical University and Golisano Children's Hospital

Amy Caruso Brown, MD, MSc, MSCS, HEC-C, Associate Professor, Bioethics and Humanities and Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University and Golisano Children's Hospital

David W. Hansen, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Thomas Scott, MD, Fellow of American Academy of Pediatrics, Community Pediatrician, Child Health Care Associates

David Amberg, PhD, Vice President for Research, Upstate Medical University

Martha Wojtowycz, PhD, Director, Upstate Master of Public Health Program, Upstate Medical University

Leah Bennett, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Emergency Medicine and Public Health and Preventative Medicine, Upstate Medical University and Golisano Children's Hospital

Elizabeth Paulsen Lodge, MD, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Sherard Tatum, MD, Professor of Otolaryngology and Pediatrics

Megan Campbell, DO, Community Pediatrician, Madison Irving Pediatrics

Karen Teelin, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Director of Adolescent Medicine, Upstate Medical University and Golisano Children's Hospital

Erin Hanley, MD, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Emergency Medicine, Upstate Medical University

Kayla Dueland-Kuhn, MD, Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatric Emergency Medicine

Travis Hobart, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Upstate Medical University

Leonard Levy, MD, FAAP, Clinical Associate Professor Emeritus Dept Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University, retired community pediatrician

Jaclyn Sisskind, MD, FAAP, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Cynthia Bright, MD, FAAP, Retired Pediatrician

Heather Wasik, MD, MHS, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Roger Wong, PhD, MPH, MSW, Assistant Professor of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Upstate Medical University

Susan E Stred, MD, Professor Emeritus of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Elizabeth Nelsen, MD, FAAP, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Pediatric Residency Program Director, Upstate Medical University

Sriram Narsipur, MD, FASN, FACP, Professor and Chair, Department of Medicine, Upstate Medical University

Rhonda Philopena, MD, Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Emergency Medicine, Upstate Medical University

Victoria Meguid, MB, BS, Clinical Associate Professor Emeritus, Department of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University, retired

Elizabeth Asiago-Reddy, MD, MS, Chief and Associate Professor of Infectious Disease, Upstate Medical University

Lauren Carlyle, MD, MPH, FAAP, Pediatrician, Brighton Hill Pediatrics

Roz Odin, MD, FAAP, Pediatrician, Child HealthCare Associates

Andrea Shaw, MD, Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine & Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Sarah Finocchiaro, MD, FAAP, Pediatrician, River View Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University, Crouse Hospital

Terri Hargrave, MD, MPH, FAAP, FAPA, Associate Professor Emeritus, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Upstate Medical University, retired community pediatrician

Derek Gorski, DO, FAAP, Pediatrician, Brighton Hill Pediatrics

Stuart Trust, DO, FAAP, Professor Emeritus of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Olamide Ajagbe, MD, FAAP, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Dongliang Wang, PhD, Associate Professor of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Upstate Medical University

Asalim Thabet, MD, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Emergency Medicine, Upstate Medical University

Melissa Schafer, MD, Clinical Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University and Golisano Children's Hospital

Matthew Thornton, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics and Emergency Medicine, Upstate Medical University

Kate Robinson, MD, CLC, FAAP, Volunteer Faculty Dept of Pediatrics, Lyndon Pediatrics

Lawrence Chin, MD, Dean, College of Medicine, Robert B. and Molly G. King Professor of Neurosurgery, Upstate Medical University

Ann Botash, MD, Sr. Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Professor, Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Jarrold Bagatell, MD, Director, Employee/Student Health, Upstate Medical University

Lauren Lipeski, MD, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University

Howard Weinberger, MD, Emeritus Professor of Pediatrics

Alicia Pekarsky, MD, FAAP, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University and Golisano Children's Hospital

Theresa Hargraves, MD, Pediatrics and Psychiatry, Upstate Medical University

Robert, Lebel, MD, FACMG, Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University
William Marx, DO, FACS, Professor of Surgery Upstate Medical University
Mark Schmitt, PhD, Dean, College of Graduate Studies; Professor of Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, Upstate Medical University
Monica Jones, MD, FAAP, Pediatrician, Syracuse Pediatrics, Syracuse Pediatrics
Jessica Mayer, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine & Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University
Anjali Sura, MD, Assistant Professor, Pediatric Rheumatology Upstate Medical University
Rebecca Garden, PhD, Associate Professor, Public Health & Preventive Medicine, Upstate Medical University
Gloria Kennedy, MD, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Pediatric Hematology/Oncology, Upstate Medical University and Golisano Children's Hospital
Priyanka Kaul, MD, Pediatrician, Lyndon Pediatrics
Tracy Massa, MD, FAAP, Pediatrician, Child Health Care Associates
Sean O'Malley, MD, Pediatrician, Child Health Care Associates
Yekaterina, Okhman, MD, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Upstate Medical University