



COUNTY OF BUCKS

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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DAVID C. DAMSKER, M.D., M.P.H.

Dear Colleagues,

11/11/2020

The Bucks County Department of Health (BCDOH), the PA Department of Health (PADOH) and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) have released guidance for many issues over the past several months for schools. These are clearly recommendations, not requirements. As expected, each school district has thus far made the best decisions for their communities based on that guidance and other factors specific to the district. As you have seen this week, PDE and the CHOP Policy center in Philadelphia, have recently made the suggestion to move to all virtual learning now that transmission is labeled as “substantial.” **The Bucks County Department of Health unconditionally recommends not to change the model of instruction for your school districts to virtual at this time.**

To be sure, COVID-19 cases in our community are higher over the last few weeks, and have gotten to levels we haven't seen in Bucks County since the pandemic began. However, we can say the following with confidence so far:

- There is no existing evidence, anywhere, indicating that in-person schooling contributes to spread in the community. Likewise, there is no evidence that closures alone will slow spread in the community.
- When a school's health and safety plan is followed, we have not seen any evidence of in-school spread, either to other students or staff. This doesn't mean it won't ever happen. But it does mean that our school district health safety plans are extremely effective.
- More than 450 children and staff have been quarantined from close exposures to cases in school, with no positive cases resulting from those exposures.
- Cases brought to school have been traced to exposures outside of school, most commonly household contacts and social gatherings – situations where the involved cases were not masking appropriately. These exposures will continue to occur regardless of a school's status.
- Almost 40% of our cases have occurred in students and staff that were in full virtual mode at the time of infection.
- We have had more than 1200 cases in Bucks County children with only mild disease so far; none have been hospitalized or severely ill. While it's clearly not impossible to occur, the numbers indicate it's very rare.

The current data indicates that, because of our strong school health and safety plans, children and teachers are safe in our schools, even when there are many cases in the community. All studies indicate that in-person learning is the best model for effective learning – our schools have proven to be a safe and structured environment where this can occur.

BCDOH has been your partner through this pandemic, since the earliest days, and we have done the work to gather what we hope has been helpful data and guidance for school districts to rely upon. We will continue to do our best to support your efforts to teach children in whatever model is chosen.

Thank you all for the hard work you have done, and we look forward to continue strengthening our relationships through the coming months.

David C. Damsker, MD, MPH
Director
Bucks County Health Department