

August 5, 2021

Dear Parents, Students, Community Members, and Staff,

In preparing for the upcoming school year, we have been carefully monitoring the COVID case counts in our county and region. During this time our hopes continued to be that Moscow School District would be able to start the school year with minimal safety precautions needed for the COVID pandemic.

The initial recommendation which was going to be proposed at the July board meeting was to require mask wearing indoors of all students in grades Kindergarten through 6th since they have not had the opportunity to receive the vaccination (This will be all 6th graders even though a few students may be 12 years old and have received their vaccination). The 7th through 12th graders, as well as our staff, would have been notified that they are highly recommended to wear a mask in the school buildings, but not required.

Our goal behind this possible proposal for the start of the year was based on our continuing efforts in caring for the safety of everyone in our facilities and return our academic activities back to our normal routine as best we can.

However, opening plans had to be reevaluated due to recent information regarding the COVID Delta Variant and the CDC's recommendation that all K-12 schools should require mask wearing indoors for both vaccinated and unvaccinated, especially if the area was identified as having high transmission. Latah County has been identified as being at the high level, however, it should be noted we had also communicated with the Regional Director of North Central Health District regarding COVID cases in the Central Idaho Region. The regional director did not understand how the CDC determined Latah County was placed at the high transmittal level. So, with this information the following actions were recommended to the Board and approved.

- Masks required indoors for the first three weeks (September 22) for all students and staff unless documented medical exemption. This will allow us to monitor the conditions with the increase in our community when the college students return, as well as the impact of having all our students back in the classroom.
- Students will be in school five days a week. No hybrid or Online-Only option. (For anyone wanting online-only instruction we are happy to work with you to enroll in the Idaho Digital Learning Academy [IDLA]).
- Social Distancing will be done to the best of our ability but will be very limited due to having all students back in the school facilities at the same time.
- Students that have been identified as being in contact with a COVID positive individual will not have to isolate if they are symptom free and show proof they have their COVID vaccination shots completed. Students who cannot show they have been vaccinated will still be required to isolate as required last year.
- After the first 15 school days it is likely the recommendation (with continued low cases that we will move to the original recommendation mentioned in the second paragraph of this letter.

To help understand our reasoning for encouraging students receiving the vaccination please see the below information from Dr. Summer Day. Dr. Day is a pediatrician in our community and parent of children in the Moscow School District. She has been an advocate for the health and safety of children throughout the pandemic and provided the following statement regarding the COVID-19 vaccine:

The COVID-19 vaccine is recommended and strongly encouraged for all ages 12 and above. Even with new variants and breakthrough cases, the vaccine is still effective at preventing community spread, serious cases, hospitalization and death.

Complications from the vaccine are quite rare and are much less severe than complications from COVID-19 itself. The most serious potential complication from the vaccine, a heart inflammation called myocarditis, affects fewer than 1/50,000 vaccine recipients; the rare patients who develop this condition typically do so a few days after the second dose and fully recover after a mild course.

By contrast, complications from the COVID-19 illness, such as long COVID and MIS-C (an inflammatory condition that can lead to heart failure) occur much more frequently and can have profound long-lasting effects. In my clinic, I have personally treated several patients facing acute and long-lasting effects from COVID-19. I have encountered zero cases of serious complications from the vaccine.

Ultimately, it comes down to this: the risk of complications from the COVID-19 illness is greater than risks from the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccination reduces transmission of the disease and protects against developing serious symptoms. All of the teenagers and adults in my household have been vaccinated. I strongly believe that this is the best way to protect both my family and our community.

I understand the decision to get the COVID-19 vaccine can be a difficult one. If you have questions about getting the COVID-19 vaccine for yourself or your children, please speak to a medical provider you trust.

If you are wanting to get the vaccine, but unsure of how to do so, here are some options:

-Idaho Public Health, North Central District has clinics for all ages in Lewiston. You can sign up through Idahoprepmo.com or by calling 208-799-3100

-Most local pharmacies intermittently carry Pfizer vaccine (the current vaccine approved for ages 12-17).

-Your medical provider may hold clinics or have further information on obtaining the vaccine.

Please also note that we will be having a Community Chat with the Superintendent (Zoom) at 7:00p.m. on August 11th. You can go to our website at www.msd281.org for the Zoom address. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gregory J Bailey, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Moscow School District #281