



**MEDIA RELEASE – OPINION-EDITORIAL
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**St. Clair County Health Department-Opinion Editorial
Working Together to Get Our Kids Back to School**

Here we are, staring down the barrel of COVID again. It's been a difficult year for all of us. No one has fully escaped the burden of trying to make choices that impact our health and the health of others. The vast amount of uncertainty, misinformation, and real-time adjustments of guidance has all of us weary and confused. Counting bodies has not been easy for us, and our only fight in these contentious times is the fight against the virus SARS-CoV-2 and trying to reduce the negative impact it is having on everyone.

In addition to the devastation of illness, long term complications and death that COVID causes, we know that our young people have had incredible losses from the policies we have used to try and control this problem. We all can agree that our children are one of our greatest resources and any healthy community should assure that they receive the best we have to give. Keeping them in the classroom is a critical component of this, even knowing that putting them together indoors will increase their risk of getting infected. How can we find a solution to this?

One thing is very clear; if widespread and uncontrolled COVID infection occurs, in-class learning will be disrupted. Individuals who are infected will have to remain out until 10 days following the onset of their symptoms (isolation). Those who were exposed to people who are known to be infected have no way of knowing if they actually did get a viral load sufficient to cause illness. However, if they were vaccinated, wearing a mask, and keeping their distance while indoors, the RISK of this gets progressively less. Each layer of mitigation adds a layer of protection. If there are NO protections the risk of an exposed individual actually getting infected is relatively high. Remember the Delta variant is even more contagious than the virus circulating this past winter. That means every person within 6 feet of an infected individual for 15 minutes, who is not fully vaccinated, will be required to stay home and not interact with people outside of their family (quarantine). But if there are consistent layers of protection in place during exposure we can assume (from the observations and studies from last school year) that the risk of transmission is very low beyond 3 feet, and we can let students stay in the classroom despite having an exposure.

The choice is clearly there for every school and parent to make: do the things that reduce viral transmission and infections (to the extent that we know them) or allow your child to certainly be exposed and infected in school. Is not wearing a mask worth not going to school? Does the avalanche of misinformation and anger make an entire body of evidence supporting risk reduction strategies go away? Do you really believe that an entire nation of health care workers, researchers and scientists are systematically and nefariously creating scenarios to harm your kid? I hope you will join us in saying "no" to the above questions and embrace the hope that quality medicine and science can bring. Do the right thing: choose health.

Yours in health,

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