



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROY COOPER  
GOVERNOR

August 12, 2021

Dear School Board Chair:

We are writing with an urgent request that you fully implement the health protections in the North Carolina StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit to protect students and staff in this new school year.

Keeping children and staff in the classroom full-time for in-person learning is essential and following these health guidelines is the best way to ensure it. None of us wants to close schools to in-person learning.

Because children under 12 cannot yet get a vaccine and the percent of children 12-18 years old who are vaccinated is low, all students, teachers and staff in grades K-12 should wear masks in schools regardless of vaccination status.

Our urgency is due to the rapidly increasing spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19 in North Carolina. Unfortunately, COVID-19 hospitalizations have more than doubled over the past two weeks, cases have increased by more than 50% in seven days, and the number of people going to the emergency department with COVID-like symptoms is rising.

In addition, we are seeing increasing rates of infection in children. While it is still unclear if the Delta variant causes more severe illness in children than prior variants, we are seeing increasing hospitalizations for pediatric patients. In addition, we are still learning more about the risk of long-term complications in children.

Vaccines remain our best weapon to fight the pandemic, and we ask that you find ways to encourage your staff and eligible students to get vaccinated. Many of our counties lag the state and nation on vaccine uptake.

As you know, several school districts which had decided to make face coverings optional wisely have reversed course. Please join them and others by adopting strong health protocols.

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We would be happy to join you and your county public health experts to assist with implementation. We know this year brings you challenges like no other, and we appreciate the work you are doing to educate our state's children.

Sincerely,

Roy Cooper  
Governor

Dr. Mandy Cohen  
Secretary, DHHS

Dr. Betsey Tilson  
State Health Director

