

May 14, 2021

Dear Education and Child Care Professionals,

I write to you today to underscore the continued importance of supporting children as we navigate this recovery phase of our COVID-19 response. From the beginning, this response effort has been grounded in mitigating risk and protecting our vulnerable populations, realizing that completely eliminating risk was never an option. We appreciate the difficult position school administrators and child care providers, who are not necessarily health professionals, have had to navigate. Your efforts over the last year have required patience, grace, and flexibility. For that, we are tremendously grateful.

For the 2020-2021 school year—knowing that spread of disease in schools is minimal and can be mitigated with strong infection control measures—Iowa shifted to support safe, in-person learning. And for child care settings, Iowa's child care providers remained open, supported by DHS. To successfully implement that strategy, Iowa issued guidance that allowed children exposed to COVID-19 while wearing a cloth face covering to avoid quarantine. This allowed kids to remain in school, with all of the benefits that in-person learning provides. Cloth face coverings have been one of the tools in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 and, along the way, additional tools to treat and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 have also come along, such as therapeutics and vaccines.

Our response today does not, and should not, look the same as it did a year ago. In fact, yesterday the CDC announced updated guidance rolling back mask usage for adults. Our guidance is also evolving as we learn more information. This evolution allows people to hone in on what is risky and what is not—which ultimately keeps our collective public health response strong.

With that in mind, and with acknowledgement that the goal of every educational institution and child care provider is to safeguard children from harm and foster inclusion, today, the Iowa Department of Public Health has adjusted its guidance to recommend that schools and childcare settings approach COVID-19 like other child illnesses. For ease of reference, please see the attached detailed list of common child illnesses and exclusion criteria, which now includes COVID-19. This guidance comes in consultation with the Department of Education, and underscores that the overall health and well-being of children must be our primary focus.

We are concurrently revising our COVID-19 guidance for school and child care settings, including quarantine guidance, to recommend that while COVID-19 positive and symptomatic children should be excluded, exposed children should no longer be required to stay home, regardless of mask usage. Moreover, when there is a positive case, parents

should be given information around exposure to COVID-19 in order to make their own informed decisions regarding risk. To that end, while we acknowledge that some parents may want their child to continue to wear a cloth face covering for reasons that make sense for their family or that child's individual health condition, we urge schools and child care settings to provide parents and students with the option to make their own decision about mask usage.

As this school year winds down and summer school and camps begin, we must work together to continue to support a flexible approach. We stand ready to provide the support necessary to ensure our children's success.

Sincerely,



Kelly Garcia
Director, Departments of Public Health and Human Services

CC: LEA Superintendents
LEA Principals
Nonpublic School Administrators
LEA School Business Officials
LEA Directors of Special Education
AEA Chief Administrators
AEA Ed Services Directors
AEA Media Services Directors
AEA Business Officials
AEA Directors of Special Education
Childcare Resource and Referral
All Licensed and Registered Childcare Entities
Early Childhood Iowa