



## Public Information Release

### High Community Transmission of COVID-19

August 20, 2021

According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Data Tracker, community transmission of COVID-19 has reached the “high” threshold in Madison County. In the first three weeks of August, more than 160 new cases of COVID-19 have been reported to Madison County Public Health. This nearly equals the total number of cases reported during the months of May, June, and July combined. In response to the rapid increase in cases, Madison County Health Commissioner Chris Cook is asking everyone age two and older to wear a mask when indoors. But Cook notes that this is neither a mandate nor a recommendation. “I’m going to call this what it is. It’s a plea,” Cook says. He is urging both vaccinated and unvaccinated people to wear a mask right now while transmission is high. His advice is simple: “Wear a mask indoors at church, schools, indoor events, meetings, and in the workplace,” he says.

The CDC’s four-tiered system measures the level of community transmission in each county in the country based on population. “Low” transmission for Madison County is considered no more than 5 cases per week. “Moderate” transmission is considered between 5 and 21 cases per week while “substantial” transmission is 22 to 45 cases per week. “High” transmission is over 45 cases per week. During the last week 59 new cases have been reported in Madison County.

Cook cites the sudden surge in cases and the unique aggressiveness of the delta variant as the reasons why even vaccinated people should be wearing a mask right now. “Our COVID-19 vaccines do an amazing job at preventing severe illness. But they do not stop all transmission of the virus,” he reports. Compared to early variations of the virus, the delta variant multiplies much more quickly. “The delta variant turns your body into a high-speed photocopier. It’s overwhelming what it can do in a short amount of time,” Cook notes. Unvaccinated people have a high risk of getting very sick and ending up in the hospital while vaccinated people have a very low risk. “The pandemic is not over. When we have this much transmission of a new variant, everyone needs to do their part and wear a mask,” Cook says.

The COVID-19 delta variant is currently the predominant strain in Ohio. Experts estimate that the delta variant is 50% more contagious than the alpha variant, which is itself 50% more contagious than the original virus that started the pandemic. Until vaccine becomes available to all ages, Cook says the need to protect those who cannot get a vaccine yet has never been greater. “We have a vastly more contagious variant of the virus and those under 12 cannot get vaccinated yet. Masks are key right now,” he says. When worn correctly and consistently masks work to keep droplets carrying the virus contained behind the mask; they also help keep airborne droplets from being inhaled. Masks work best when everyone wears them according to Cook. “Masks are for now, not forever,” he said. “We need to recognize what is going on around us, act like a community, and make respectful choices.”

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