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COVID-19 prevention recommendations released for K-12 schools

(Salt Lake City) - Today, the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) released recommendations for K-12 schools amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“We strongly recommend local health departments and schools use a layered prevention approach, including encouraging vaccination and mask wearing, among other strategies,” said Dr. Michelle Hofmann, deputy director of the UDOH. “Doing so can help minimize the disruptions of COVID-19 on schools while maximizing opportunities for children to participate in in-person learning and extracurricular activities.”

The UDOH strongly recommends the following layered prevention strategies in K-12 schools:

- Encouraging everyone 12 years and older to get vaccinated for COVID-19
- Wearing a mask when indoors
- Isolating at home if you test positive for COVID-19
- Quarantine and other protective measures after a school exposure
- Testing for COVID-19
- Staying home when you're sick
- Physical distancing and cohorting
- Improving or increasing indoor ventilation
- Hygiene practices
- Cleaning and disinfection

The recommendations can be found at <https://coronavirus.utah.gov/education>. They were developed after extensive discussion and input from stakeholders including local school administrators, local health officers, the Utah Education Association, parents, physicians, locally elected officials, the state legislature, and the Governor's Office.

In order to support in-person education while still trying to keep children and families healthy, additional options regarding K-12 school exposures have been developed. Local health departments and local education agencies will work together, using local data, to identify which recommended quarantine and protective measures are used to protect the health of K-12 students and school staff in their area. Recommendations may be different across the state. Parents and school staff who have questions about how COVID-19 will be handled in their school or at extracurricular activities should contact their local health department or school for more information.

“Vaccination is the best way to keep our children safe and healthy in school and free from the disruptions to their learning and extracurricular activities that Utah experienced last school year. I strongly encourage parents to consider having their children wear masks in school because Utah is experiencing high transmission levels of COVID-19. Many of our school-aged children

are unable to be vaccinated at this time and masks are the next best protection,” said Dr. Leisha Nolen, state epidemiologist with the UDOH. “We ask all Utahns to get vaccinated. If you have questions I encourage you to seek out credible information about the vaccines from your healthcare provider and respected health organizations.”

COVID-19 vaccinations are FREE and available to anyone 12 and older. The Pfizer vaccine is the only COVID-19 vaccine authorized for children 12 to 17 years. The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccines are authorized for people ages 18 and older. Visit <https://coronavirus.utah.gov/vaccine> to learn more about the vaccines and find a vaccine provider near you.

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