COVID-19: Get On the Bus
By Dr. Michele Dikkers, Chair of Clayton County Board of Health

The smell that wafts from a new box of crayons or new #2 yellow pencils brings back memories of school buses, new book bags, back packs and folders. Memories of new tennis shoes, stories of summer vacations and swinging on the monkey bars.

As students and parents look forward to the start of the school year, there brings along with it a certain amount of worry and concern. Will the students have to wear masks? What about riding the bus? How will the teachers teach class if they have to wear masks? What happens when a student or teacher gets sick or comes down with COVID-19?

This year school will have a bit of a different look and feel. COVID-19 continues to infect and kill people of all ages around the world on a daily basis. How can we keep our children and teachers safe?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has been clear, students need to get back to school, but they need to do it safely. In an article released by the AAP on August 13, 2020, they state… for “COVID-19, effective infection control and prevention includes wearing a cloth face covering, washing hands and physical distancing. These three basic skills can be implemented easily by children and adults to help reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2.”

“This virus is going to be with us for some time, and face coverings are a proven, effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19,” said AAP President Sara “Sally” Goza, M.D., FAAP. “As parents prepare to send their children to school and into childcare settings, cloth face coverings should be part of their new normal.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends for schools many of the same things they recommend for day to day activity for everyone.

- Stay at home if you are sick, or think you may be sick
- Wear a cloth face covering, whenever you are closer than 6 feet apart
- Physically distance
- Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- Avoid large groups

These “simple” recommendations become difficult when we are talking about groups of kids in hallways, on buses, at assemblies, in cafeterias, at recess, in locker rooms and sports.

Know that your superintendents, principals, teachers and staff have been working hard at combing through guidelines from the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Department of Public Health, CDC, AAP, and the Governor, to come up with a safe plan for the students’ return to school. They have worked through learning how to cohort classes and how they may need to do contact tracing of students and teachers. They have plans for all students in the building, plans for some students in school/some remote learning and plans for everyone learning remotely. If that wasn’t enough, they have plans for how to navigate back and forth between them all.

As we learn more about COVID-19, we know that children can get COVID-19, but likely have milder symptoms. And, just like colds, strep throat and pink eye, they will share it with each other and bring it home to their families, to parents and grandparents that may end up with much more serious issues and complications.
So, as we take the list of school supplies and gather everything together, remember to pick up masks. Understand that a plan has been thoughtfully put together for your school. Be supportive of helping your children understand how easy it is to wear the mask, wash their hands and physically distance. These are learned things that will make a large difference in protecting the students, the teachers, our families and community.

Remember, children are imitators. If they see others wearing masks, they will wear masks. It will become normal. And we can get the students “back to normal”.

Here comes the bus! Get on it!!

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