OPERATIONAL UPDATE

Franklin County Schools Board of Education Meeting January 10, 2022 Dr. Rhonda Schuhler, Superintendent



Current Situation

- ▷ Cases are dramatically on the rise in Franklin County, statewide and nationally.
- ▷ We are in a rapidly changing environment and the rules continue to shift (new guidance 12/30 and again 1/7).
- Our school staff are to be commended for stretching themselves to do double and triple duty to cover for staff absences.
- Currently state legislation does not allow for a hybrid or remote learning schedule beyond emergency, temporary situations for individual classrooms or schools. We also recognize the importance of face-to-face learning for our students' academic, social and emotional development and well-being.
- Our primary goal is to remain operational and we are taking this day by day. I have asked that non-essential expectations that may divide the attention of staff be curbed until at least early February.
- ▷ This is the most intense period of management of the pandemic since it began in March 2020.
- ▷ We are hopeful that projections the Omicron variant will rapidly peak and decline are accurate.



- Franklin County's number of <u>New-Cases</u> are at meteoric increase-levels, now averaging 522 new cases per week (it was 180/week the prior week). Franklin County has surpassed our previous biggest single-day number of new cases (during the first major surge 2020-2021 at 121 cases), on several days since the last report. (-)
- <u>Staffing Shortages</u>: If you don't already have staff out due to COVID-19 isolations or quarantines, you soon will. This will have a significant impact on businesses and governments' operations
- The number of <u>Partially Vaccinated</u> Residents remained at 54% of the total population, with the number of new "partially-vaccinated" residents increasing by 180 from last week's total! (-)
- The number of <u>Fully-Vaccinated</u> Residents remained **51%** of the total population (Goal is for a minimum of 70% of the total Population Fully-Vaccinated for Herd-Immunity; Wake county is at 71%). (–)
- Positivity Rate on 1/6/22 was 21.5% (up 9.9 percentage points from last week), and is well-above our goal of 5% or lower; (-)

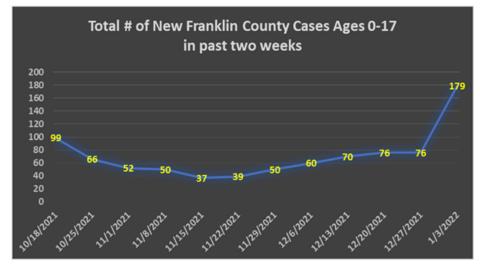




- <u>CDC Still ranks</u> Franklin County as a "High" Transmission County, along with all 100 other counties in NC this week!; (–)
- <u>17% of our new cases</u> are from the <u>0-17 age group</u> (down 4 from last week), placing us at 4 percentage points above our goal of at/below 14%.
 (-)

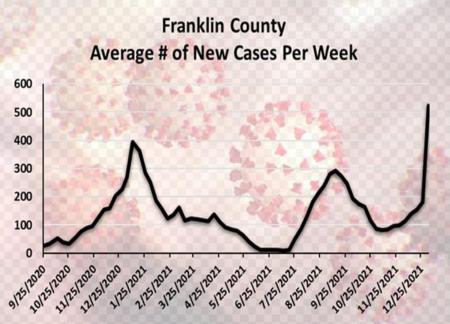


Past Two-Weeks' Total New Cases Age 0-17 Graph: To better gauge impact on schools, we continue providing a graph which shows the total number of new cases over the past two weeks in the ages 0-17 group. We include even non-school age children (ages 0-4) as they can transmit to school age siblings. We choose our initial goal of less than 100 in this age group given the possibility they could transmit the virus to siblings and others in school and on the bus, which could take the total positives to close to 14% of the FCS population. Our goal is for the number of new cases ages 0-17 to be at or below 10 new cases per two weeks, as this was where we were (in June/July) before school resumed this fall. This week we saw an unprecedented increase from last week, and this number remains well-above our goal. (–)



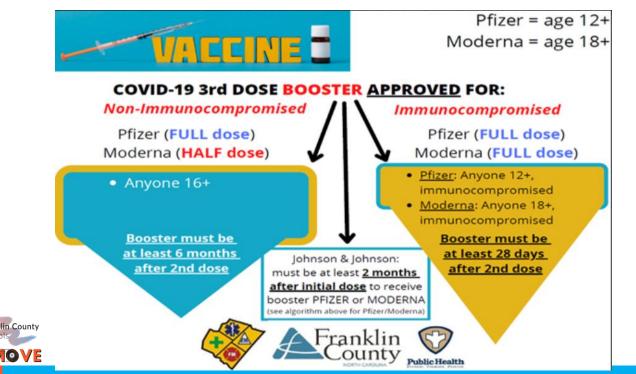


Franklin County's <u>Average Number of New Cases per week</u> increased this week to **522**/week (up 180 from last week). This makes seven weeks in a row this number has increased (see graph below), and represents an exponential increase from last week; (–)





Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson All Approved for Boosters: Boosters remain available for all three COVID-19 Vaccines in Franklin County for EVERYONE age 18 and older. On 12/9/21, the FDA, CDC and NCDHHS approved Booster shots for <u>everyone ages 16 and older</u> (which means Pfizer boosters only for ages 16-17), at least 6 months since their second dose. Here is our most current Booster Dose Graphic:



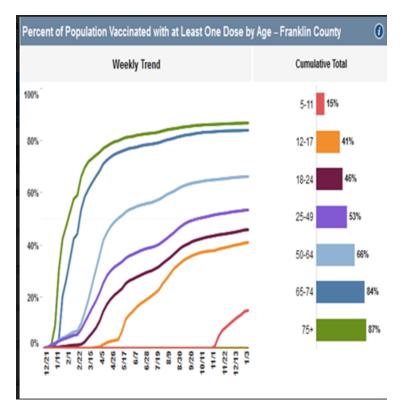


Mixing or Matching of Vaccines for Boosters: The FDA and CDC continue to allow the use of COVID-19 vaccines for boosters that could be different from your original dose(s). Please understand that most providers will not have sufficient stock of all three vaccines to allow for patients to choose their booster vaccine. Consult with your vaccine provider for more details. As a general rule, most providers will attempt to match your booster to your first original vaccine, except in the case of J&J, where it may be preferable to administer either Pfizer or Moderna (instead of J&J) as a J&J-1st-dose-recipients booster shots.

Pfizer for Children ages 5-11: Demand for vaccine in this age group has flattened over the past two weeks, but was sufficient to increase the percentage of those age 5-11 who are vaccinated by two percentage points, and those ages 12-17 by one percentage point since last week. Children in this age group can still receive a vaccine at our regular clinics, and a parent must be present for their child to receive a vaccine. Appointments remain open and available for this age group, along with everyone else who is eligible for initial vaccine-doses or boosters, and can be made by using this link:

https://www.franklincountync.us/covid









<u>Vaccination Trends</u>: As the primary provider of COVID-19 vaccinations in Franklin County, Pediatric Second doses and Adult-booster-doses remain the overwhelming majority of all vaccines currently being administered in Franklin County. Given we remain at 49% unvaccinated, this makes the county <u>has resulted in record numbers of new cases in Franklin County, largely</u> <u>amongst the unvaccinated and un-boosted population</u>. There are also a significant number of people who previously had COVID-19 who are being re-infected with a second infection of COVID-19. At present, the unvaccinated population in Franklin County continues to show little/no movement toward vaccine adoption at this time.

<u>Omicron Variant</u>: The numbers speak for themselves. We continue seeing exponential growth in new cases beyond anything previously recorded in the COVID-19 Pandemic to-date. North Carolina's Daily New Case a record 24,292 is twice the number recorded during the record surge of 2020-2021, and is presently showing no signs of slowing.



Testing Demand in Franklin County Exceeds Capacity: For the past four weeks, FCHD has been working diligently to increase COVID-19 Testing Capacity within Franklin County in advance of this unprecedented but not unanticipated surge in COVID-19 cases. We are continuing to expand our testing at FCHD for the Week of 1/10/22. That being said, the developed COVID-19 testing capacity for all of Franklin County was based on the NCDHHS goal of "capacity to test 5% of the population in one month." Based on our current actual testing numbers, we are on pace to have well-over 17% of Franklin County residents tested this month, and that number is only rising. With Wake county restricting access to their COVID-19 testing capacity (going to appointment-only, and some locations requiring Wake County residency) our residents are looking within Franklin County for testing. This will worsen if/when OSHA ETSs become fully-approved (as of the date/time of this email, the US Supreme Court had not issued their ruling).

Definition of "Fully Vaccinated" Likely to change soon: Preliminary data indicating those closest to completing their postsecond-dose two week time period, and those closest to completing their post-boosters two week time period, were both best able to fight off Omicron. Given this, we anticipate there will soon be a change to the Federal and State Definitions of what it means to be "Fully-Vaccinated" that will include having a booster. For Pfizer and Moderna this means three doses and for J&J it means at least two doses. With recent CMS and OSHA rulings, this could have a significant impact on employers. Please encourage EVERYONE who is eligible to get their booster as soon as they are eligible!



Vaccination Requirement for Employees 1.7.2022

You may have read in the news that the U.S. Department of Labor has announced an OSHA Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) for employers with 100 or more employees in 26 states that operate under the OSHA umbrella. Franklin County Schools meets the 100+ employees rule and North Carolina is one of the 26 states currently operating under OSHA.

This announcement came on November 4, 2021 and the expectations of the ETS were to become effective January 3, but it is currently being contested in court. This is a complex issue, and while it is being dealt with at the state and federal levels through legal actions, we are monitoring it closely. There is a chance that we will be required to implement ETS, and if so we would have a very narrow window to implement once we receive official word.

If enacted, the ETS would require:

- Covered employers must determine and verify/document the vaccination status of all employees.
- All nonvaccinated employees are required to wear face coverings while indoors in work facilities and when in cars with fellow employees. (In the event Franklin County Schools' Board of Education moves to masks optional, masks would still be required for nonvaccinated employees in accordance with this rule.)
- All nonvaccinated employees must have weekly COVID-19 tests if they are working on-site at their employer's workplace. The results must be shared with the employer. Employees who test positive must be excluded from the workplace until no longer contagious.

The Supreme Court met Friday on this issue and they are likely to rule soon on whether this mandate will be blocked or upheld. In the event that the mandate is allowed, we are prepared to administer a survey to all staff to determine vaccination status and to communicate with non-vaccinated staff on weekly testing



Staffing Challenges and Our Response

Staffing Challenges:

- High infections rates combined with cold and flu season have increased daily absences for all staff.
- COVID-19 testing sites are overwhelmed and it is taking multiple days for staff to set up testing appointments and get their results.
- In the middle of a staffing shortage, increased absences are straining our substitute pool.
- Isolation of dual employees is increasing our need to run double bus routes
 - Instructional Assistants are often the preferred substitute by our principals, so double routes also impact supervision of students during driving times.

Response:

FCS will be looking at a financial incentive for substitutes that will financially reward substitutes that work a given number days in a pay period. Our plan is to bring this plan to the Board of Education in the February meeting.

The decreased isolation time is allowing our employees to return at a quicker rate.





Dashboard from December BOE Meeting

FCS		CO	VID-19	Dashbo	ard			
Location School	Total Current Positive Staff Cases	Total Current Positive Student Cases	Total Current Positive Cases	Total Cumulative Positive Cases	Total Cumulative Clusters	Total Current Close School Contacts	Total Cumulative Close School Contacts	L
FCS District	0	20	20	490	2	18	650	
Bunn Elementary School	0	1	1	31	0	1	12	
Bunn High School	0	2	2	55	0	2	38	
Bunn Middle School	0	2	2	30	0	1	6	
Cedar Creek Middle School	0	2	2	25	0	0	19	
Central Office	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	
Edward Best Elementary School	0	3	3	38	0	3	33	L
Franklin County Early College High School	0	0	0	12	0	0	6	
Franklinton Elementary School	0	0	0	22	0	0	56	
Franklinton High School	0	3	3	77	0	3	42	
Franklinton Middle School	0	1	1	27	2	5	188	
Laurel Mill Elementary School	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	L
Long Mill Elementary School	0	4	4	27	0	0	25	L
Louisburg Elementary School	0	0	0	22	0	0	36	L
Louisburg High School	0	0	0	33	0	0	70	
Royal Elementary School	0	0	0	24	0	0	57	
Terrell Lane Middle School	0	0	0	31	0	0	23	
Youngsville Elementary School	0	2	2	22	0	3	38	





Current Dashboard as of 1.8.2022

COVID-19 Dashboard							
Location School	Total Current Positive Staff Cases	Total Current Positive Student Cases	Total Current Positive Cases	Total Cumulative Positive Cases	Total Cumulative Clusters	Total Current Close School Contacts	Total Cumulative Close School Contacts
FCS District	62	179	241	752	3	69	730
Bunn Elementary School	4	8	12	46	0	0	12
Bunn High School	8	35	43	99	1	7	45
Bunn Middle School	3	17	20	51	0	3	11
Cedar Creek Middle School	4	12	16	44	0	26	45
Central Office	3	0	3	7	0	0	1
Edward Best Elementary School	6	15	21	61	0	0	33
Franklin County Early College High School	1	5	6	18	0	0	6
Franklinton Elementary School	3	4	7	30	0	0	60
Franklinton High School	7	27	34	115	0	0	42
Franklinton Middle School	1	8	9	37	2	5	198
Laurel Mill Elementary School	0	7	7	17	0	0	0
Long Mill Elementary School	2	8	10	37	0	2	27
Louisburg Elementary School	4	6	10	35	0	5	41
Louisburg High School	6	10	16	49	0	21	91
Royal Elementary School	2	8	10	34	0	0	57
Terrell Lane Middle School	3	6	9	42	0	0	23
Youngsville Elementary School	5	3	8	30	0	0	38



lf	Then
Person has tested positive with an antigen test but does not have symptoms of COVID-19 and is not known to be a close contact to someone diagnosed with COVID-19.	If the person has a repeat PCR test performed in a laboratory within 24 – 48 hours of their positive antigen test, and that PCR test is negative, the original test can be considered a false positive and the person can immediately return to school. If the person does not have a repeat PCR or has one within 24 – 48 hours and it is also positive, they can return to school 5 days after the test date of the first positive test as long as they are symptom free. They must wear a mask for 5 days upon return. They do not have to have a negative test to return to school.



lf	Then
Person has tested positive with a PCR test but they do not have symptoms.	Person can return to school 5 days after the test date of their positive test as long as they did not develop symptoms. The person must continue to mask for an additional 5 days to minimize risk of infecting others.



lf	ThenPerson can return to school when• It has been at least 5 days after the firstday of symptoms; AND• It has been at least 24 hours fever free(without using fever reducing medicine);		
Person has symptoms of COVID-19 and has tested positive with an antigen test or PCR test. OR			
Person has symptoms of COVID-19 but has not been tested for COVID-19 nor has visited a health care provider.	AND • Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving.		
Therefore, the person who has symptoms is presumed positive for COVID-19 due to the presence of a clinically compatible illness in the absence of testing.	The person is not required to have documentation of a negative test in order to return to school. The person must continue to wear a mask for 10 days after the first day of symptoms.		



lf	Then
Person has symptoms of COVID-19 but has received a negative test for COVID-19 or has visited a health care provider and received an alternate diagnosis that would explain the symptoms of COVID-19	 Person can return to school when: It has been at least 24 hours since the person fever free(without using fever reducing medicine); AND They have felt well for at least 24 hours.
	Note: The health care provider is not required to detail the specifics of the alternate diagnosis.



lf	Then
Person in a mask optional setting for whom an exception to exclusion does not apply and has been in close contact with someone with COVID-19.	Person must be excluded from school for 5 days after exposure. Person may return to school after exclusion if asymptomatic but must continue to wear a mask for an additional 5 days, for a total of 10 days after exposure. The 5 days of exclusion begins on the day after the last known close contact with the COVID-19 positive individual. They should test on day 5, if possible. If symptoms occur, person should immediately isolate until a test either confirms COVID-19, or a negative result rules it out.



lf	Then
 Person has been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 and is in one of the following groups: They are 18 years of age and have received their primary series AND 	Person does not need to be excluded from school if they have had no symptoms after being a close contact to someone with COVID-19.
 booster, if eligible. They are between the ages of 5-17 and have completed a primary series of COVID-19 vaccines. Boosters are not required to meet this exception for this age group. 	The person must continue to wear a mask for 10 days after the exposure to minimize the risk of infecting others and should get tested on day 5, if possible.



lf	Then
Person has been in close contact with someone with COVID-19, in which both individuals were wearing a mask the entire time.	Person does not need to be excluded from school if masks were being worn appropriately and consistently by both the person with COVID-19 and the potential exposed person. This applies to exposures in classrooms, other in-school settings, extracurricular activities, including athletic activities and school transportation.



lf... Then Person has been in close contact with Person does not need to be excluded someone with COVID-19 and had from school if they have had no confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 symptoms after being a close contact to someone with COVID-19. The person must **days** (tested positive using a viral test). continue to wear a mask for 10 days after the exposure to minimize the risk of infecting others.





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Person in a <u>mask required setting</u> and has been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 in which one or both individuals were not wearing a mask the entire time.



Then

Individuals in a mask-required school setting do NOT need to be excluded from school after a close contact, including unmasked exposures (e.g., during lunch or extracurricular activities), if they have no symptoms. Individuals with unmasked exposures in a mask-required school setting should get tested on the day of notification of exposure and as close to day 5 after exposure as possible and must wear a mask in school settings. This exemption applies to in-school exposures as described above as well as nonhousehold, out-of-school exposures. While the individual does not need to be excluded from the school setting, guarantine measures may still apply in non-school settings. If testing supply is limited, priority should be given to testing of students participating in athletics because of the higher risk of transmission in that setting.



Changes to NCDHHS Toolkit Guidance Updated 1.7.2022

The state announced a Test-to-Stay option that requires an individual to:

- Get tested the day they are notified of an exposure
- Get tested again five days after the exposure (or as close to five days as possible)
- Wear a mask for 10 days after the exposure
- Except for attending school, stay home and avoid others

This option was just announced on Friday and we have a number of questions about this new standard. With testing opportunities that are limited, delays in results, and monitoring/ensuring compliance, and shorter overall windows for quarantining to begin with we will need to review this option further before communicating and implementing.



Implications of Current Masking/ Quarantining Requirements

The latest guidance in the NCDHHS toolkit goes on to state that when community transmission is at **low** levels, masks could be optional for everyone.

If we wait until we reach "low transmission" status in our community, then we will be able to make masks optional and will not have to identify students as vaccinated/unvaccinated for masking purposes.

This approach is recommended.





Implications of Current Masking/ Quarantining Requirements

How is "low transmission" defined?

A positivity rate of **equal to or** less than 5% for 7 or more consecutive days (Right now we are at **21.5%**)

Less than **14** new cases in Franklin County in a one week period of time (We are currently at **522** new cases in a one week period of time.)





Recommendation to Continue Masking- for Now

- ▷ We are at peak levels for COVID-19 in our community, and cases are on the rise.
- ▷ The Omicron variant is **highly** contagious.
- Although quarantine guidance means less lengthy quarantining, with 5 day vs. 10 or 14 day exclusions, the state has increased the stipulation for 5 days (or 10 days in some instances) of required masking within the school setting upon return. Without a masking requirement, schools would have to track and enforce masking requirements for individuals in the school setting. This would be confusing and challenging for an already stretched staff to manage.
- Our BOE has relied on current metrics and the guidance of the NCDHHS toolkit to make informed decisions based upon the latest health and safety data.
- We have parents who may be upset about current masking requirements, but we have parents and staff who will be upset if we as a district operate outside of the guidance of health and safety that has been established at the state and local levels.
- When our metrics meet the targets established by NCDHHS, we will reconvene and the BOE could make a determination to shift to a "masks optional" environment. At that point we would be on solid ground in shifting our approach in that it would align with the current toolkit guidance for safe operation of schools. Based upon current metrics, we aren't at that point.



Seeking BOE Approval:

Masking

Recommendation for BOE Consideration:

Continue required masking indoors at all times for all preK-12 students, staff and visitors to campus, with the exception of meals and in the event of a district-approved mask exemption for medical reasons.

Rationale: CDC, NCDHHS, and FC Health Department all still recommend this requirement. **We are prepared to reconvene the BOE on this issue in the event that we reach "low transmission" status for 7 or more consecutive days.**





We recognize that this is an evolving situation. The Franklin County Schools Board of Education is committed to creating a safe learning environment for our students and staff. We will continue to monitor state and local data closely, and are prepared to hold a special call meeting in the event that we need to revisit our current guidance to either loosen up or tighten up restrictions.



