

September 23, 2020

St. Louis County COVID-19 Update

Youth Sports and Education Update

The St. Louis County Department of Public Health has based its decisions on reopening guidelines on data involving COVID-19 transmission and its impact on our community. The most recent data, available on stlcorona.com, shows that cases of COVID-19 are decreasing collectively among young people. Specifically, as shown in the last two weeks, there is a pronounced drop in the rate of new cases among adolescents aged 15-19. The rate of new cases in that age group is still higher than that of younger children, but it's heading in the right direction.

In addition, the positivity rate in this same group, which was at around 20 percent at last data point, is trending sharply down. That means more adolescents are getting tested and getting negative results. That is a trend that needs to continue. We need to continue to see kids getting tested without dramatically increasing our case numbers.

Therefore, as announced by Dr. Page this morning, DPH is releasing new recommendation for school districts to allow in-person education for middle school students in addition to relaxing some restrictions involving youth sports. (Please see attached letter to school districts.)

In middle schools, recent data gives us the confidence to encourage school districts to offer additional in-person learning opportunities for middle school students. This is only a recommendation – not a mandate. School districts have worked incredibly hard to provide virtual education for their students, and we understand transitioning to in-person education will be complicated and a difficult process.

In partnership with the school districts, we are working to prepare for in-person learning for high school students. This approach deserves special attention, as their numbers are still higher. Those recommendations are expected to be finalized and available online on in the coming weeks.

In regards to youth sports, effective Monday, DPH is changing the guidelines to allow games in high-frequency of contact sports for children younger than 14 AND all children in middle school (with restrictions). That means that in sports such as football, basketball, ice hockey and wrestling, competitive games will be permitted.

DPH also will allow ALL students, including high school students of any age, to play competitive games in moderate-contact sports such as soccer, baseball, cheerleading, crew/rowing, dance team, fencing, floor hockey, field hockey, lacrosse and racquetball.

For all outdoor youth sports, we will allow two parents or spectators, per athlete, to attend games with an overall capacity of 50. This occupancy limit is not to separate parents or children, but to ensure limited crowding where COVID-19 can spread.

To better reflect the advice and experience of our stakeholders, the health department has recently broadened its group of advisers. DPH is currently speaking with athletic directors representing public and private conferences as well as medical professionals, youth and club sports officials and sports parents and enthusiasts, who are providing us additional feedback.

We fully expect this broad group of advisers to assist in the progression of the safety of high-contact sports among high school students. Again, high-contact games are still not permitted in high school. That includes sports such as football and basketball. We are actively working on a path forward that may include competitive games in those sports at some point this fall.

If the number of positive cases continues to decrease, testing numbers increase and other indicators improve among adolescents in the community at large, we can expect that in the next two or three weeks, that high contact sports at the high school level can be reevaluated.

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