



# KEARNY COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

PREVENT PROMOTE PROTECT



May 18, 2021

To our Kearny County Community:

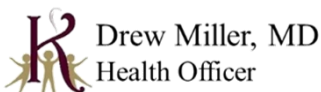
We continue to remain at level 1 from a county alert standpoint. We have had a couple of new COVID-19 cases but not enough to change our level. However, there are two very significant changes over the past two weeks that are important to share as we continue to work to eliminate COVID-19 from our community.

1. The FDA approved the Pfizer vaccine for ages 12-15. Our health department does not have Pfizer vaccine yet, but we are hoping that we can get some soon and that we can make a significant effort to get school aged kids 12 and up vaccinated this summer before school starts in the fall. Many parents have asked why they should get their children vaccinated if they are 12 or older, and here is the response:
  - a. Children have a high incidence of disease, and some small fraction get quite sick.
  - b. Children clearly can spread it to others, mostly in households, but also to other kids who live in other households; some of these households will have vulnerable populations who aren't protected by vaccines.
  - c. Outbreaks in school-age kids affect school attendance and infection control policies within the school (i.e. masks in schools, etc.).
  - d. It will allow children to safely participate in activities that have been modified or on hold (band, choir, sports).
  - e. There is so far little reason to think that a vaccine that is safe in 16-18 years olds will be different in 12-15 year olds.
  - f. The EUA process has thus far been quite rigorous, and the recent Johnson & Johnson experience tells us that the post-EUA safety monitoring is rigorous as well.
  - g. We are still in a pandemic, which calls for acceleration of control measures.
2. The CDC changed guidance on mask-wearing, now stating that those who are fully vaccinated do not have to wear a mask in most instances. The most notable exception to this locally is that individuals will still likely be required to wear a mask in healthcare facilities. One of the most frequent complaints that I have heard over the last few months is this: "If the vaccine is so good, why am I still wearing a mask." As more data has become available over the past few months, the COVID-19 vaccine has proven to be incredibly safe and effective. A study looking at patients hospitalized during the first 4 months of 2021 found that 99.75% of those hospitalized with COVID-19 were unvaccinated. This and similar other studies, plus the exponential decline in cases in the US with a corresponding increase in vaccination numbers across the country show that the COVID-19 vaccine is as effective in the "real world" as it was in trials. This is the reason that the CDC changed its guidance. From a practical standpoint it means this: If you are vaccinated, you don't need to wear a mask most of the time. If you are unvaccinated, please get your vaccine as soon as you can.

These two recent changes are great news in our continued move towards moving past the pandemic and resuming life as normal. As always, if you have not yet obtained your COVID-19 vaccine, please call the health department or your health care provider to find out when and where you can obtain the vaccine. Have a blessed week.

Stay healthy,

Drew Miller, MD, FAAFP  
Kearny County Health Officer



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