

January 3, 2022

Dear Johnson County Board of County Commissioners, School Board Administrators and School Board Members,

We are a group of pediatricians, family doctors, specialists, including pulmonologists, pathologists, and ER doctors who have been on the front lines of COVID-19 for nearly two years. We are also concerned parents. **During the week of December 24, 2021, the United States shattered records at least four times for its seven-day average of new daily COVID cases.** Now is not the time to let our guard down.

We wrote an Open Letter in the fall – calling for a K-12 mask mandate for Blue Valley Schools. The K-6 mandate was passed on August 5, 2021. On that day, the Johnson County COVID case incident rate was 222 per 100k with a 8.5% positivity rate. On December 30, 2021, the Johnson County COVID case incident rate stood at 555 per 100k with a 12.6% positivity rate. And yet, considerations are being made to remove this mandate.

With the tidal wave of Omicron hitting Johnson County, and **no virtual education option**, we are now urging all districts as well as the JoCo BOCC to think about what is at stake before you reconvene in January – **the collapse of our education and healthcare systems.**

As medical professionals who have collectively treated thousands of COVID patients, our recommendation is to keep the **K-8 mask mandate in place and to bring back the High School mandate** until we are on the other side of this historic surge. Specifically, our recommendations are for K-12 students, teachers, staff, school administrators, and visitors to wear **well-fitted masks until the Johnson County positivity rate decreases to 5% or less.**

Here are some of our top concerns:

- Omicron is up to 4x more contagious than Delta. Well-fitted masks are one of the easiest ways to slow the spread.
- **Children's Mercy Hospital – which is the *primary* hospital that admits kids from the metro – including Johnson County - is approaching their record high of COVID in-patients.** As of December 31, 2021, CMH has 21 in-patients with the virus.
- Many 12-15-year-old students are six months past their second vaccination. Even if they get a booster immediately after it's approved, it will take two weeks to reach peak efficacy.
- Only 21.5% of students 5-11-years-old in Johnson County are fully vaccinated.
- Immunocompromised students and teachers are at higher risk of becoming severely ill with COVID and even worse dying.

Johnson County schools are already facing staffing and substitute teacher shortages. Who will teach our children and run our schools when this highly transmissible variant wipes out our staff?

Area hospitals, clinics and pharmacies are also facing historic staffing shortages and some pharmacies are even closing their doors. The healthcare industry is at a breaking point.

As healthcare providers and parents in this incredible Johnson County community, we are asking for you to continue a short-term mask mandate. Without protecting this crucial mitigation strategy, more front line healthcare workers will be home with their sick children and family members and not working in area hospitals and clinics. While we are home taking care of our families, who will take care of your injuries, heart attacks, and strokes?

Your decision on a short-term mask mandate will significantly impact the entire Johnson County community — from students, teachers, staff, and administrators to parents and frontline healthcare workers.

Respectfully,

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Christian Hettinger, MD – Urology  
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Megan Loeb, MD – Pediatrics  
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Deva Chandramohan, MD – Radiologist  
George Chou, DO – Neuromuscular Medicine  
Shawna Patch, MD – Pediatrics  
Jacqueline Kitchen, MD – Internal Medicine/Pediatrics  
Amanda Thuringer, DO – Neurology  
Shailja Parikh, MD – Cardiology  
Fatima Khan, DO, FACP, FACOI – Internal Medicine  
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Stephanie Karnik, MD – Pediatrics  
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Morgan Vaughn, MD – Pediatrics  
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Amit Patel, MD – Internal Medicine, Nephrology  
Molly Uhlenhake, DO – Internal Medicine/Pediatrics  
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Sheshadri Madhusudhana, MD – Hematology/Oncology  
Revathi Bhat, MD – Internal Medicine  
Ashraf Gohar, MD – Pulmonary/Critical Care/Sleep Medicine  
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Johanna Peterson, MD – Internal Medicine  
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David Naylor- Internal Medicine  
Sara Myers, MD—Pediatrics  
Leslie Favier, MD—Pediatric Rheumatology  
Stephanie Dobler, MD- Internal Medicine/Pediatrics  
Caroline Martin, DO- Family Medicine  
Jocelyn Hunter, MD- Surgical Critical Care  
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Roma Manzoor, MD- Psychiatry  
Sobia Shafi, MD- Psychiatry  
Farah Hassan, MD- Psychiatry  
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Marty Emert, MD- Cardiology  
Rhea Pimentel, MD- Cardiology  
Raghu Dendi, MD- Cardiology  
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