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## **DHEC Recommends Vaccinations, Mask Use, and Other COVID-19 Protocols in School Guidance for K-12 2021-2022 Academic Year**

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** — The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) has issued its COVID-19 interim guidance for K-12 schools as students, teachers, parents, and staff all prepare for the 2021-2022 school year. DHEC's interim guidance includes recommendations that reflect the latest COVID-19 trends and is meant to protect everyone who plays a role in South Carolina's students receiving a quality education safely. It is important to note that this guidance may change as the situation evolves.

The full school guidance is available [here](#). Here are some of the key points:

- Schools are strongly encouraged to work with local public health officials and healthcare facilities and professionals to provide factual information and education about COVID-19 vaccination and to increase access to COVID-19 vaccines by coordinating vaccine clinics for staff, students, and families who wish to be vaccinated.
- DHEC strongly recommends mask use for all people when indoors in school settings, especially when physical distancing is not possible. Children under two years old, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone unable to remove the face covering without assistance should not wear a mask. DHEC recognizes mask use cannot be mandated per the SC General Assembly but is providing the following guidance for teachers, staff and parents.
- At least three feet of distance between each student should be maintained to the greatest extent possible.
- Case investigation and contact tracing are critical strategies to identify and isolate cases and test and quarantine close contacts to reduce transmission.
- Mask use is required on school buses and other public transportation per federal CDC Order regardless of the mask policy at school or the individual's vaccination status; school systems should take appropriate steps to ensure compliance with this requirement by students, staff, and others.

“Our first priority is the safety of our children and teachers,” **said Dr. Edward Simmer, DHEC Director.** “That is why, above all else, we’re urging all eligible South Carolinians to roll up their sleeves and get vaccinated if they haven’t already done so. The last thing we want is for COVID-19 to spread through our schools causing avoidable illness. Our students and educators deserve the right to learn and teach in a safe, healthy environment, and vaccinations will make that possible. The use of masks and other precautions recommended in our guidance will also help ensure a safe, healthy environment in our schools especially with the emergence of the Delta variant.”

DHEC reported nearly 19,000 COVID-19 cases among students and faculty through June 18, 2021, per the agency’s [COVID-19 school dashboard](#). Vaccinations are the best way to not continue to see cases in schools and to end the pandemic.

Vaccinations are available for ages 12 and up at many locations across the state. Visit DHEC’s [information page](#) for more information on the vaccines, and the [locator page](#) to schedule a vaccine appointment.

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