

Department of Public Health

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Public Health Department Strongly Recommends Schools Teach Virtually

Data and current spread in schools does not support in-person learning

City of Racine – Dottie-Kay Bowersox, Public Health Administrator for the City of Racine, is strongly recommending that schools teach virtually in the second quarter of the school year and until the data suggests it's safe for kids to return to the classroom. As Wisconsin continues to be in the top 3 hot spots in the nation, Racine County and the City of Racine also continue to experience high caseloads of COVID-19. The regional medical systems continue to see an increase in patient COVID-19 hospitalizations and local school systems are seeing growth in the number of COVID-19 positive students and faculty as well.

“COVID-19 cases are spread throughout the school systems within this jurisdiction. Cases are presenting in children who are learning in person, staff who are teaching both in person and virtually, and in high-risk sports activities at schools. The Public Health Department understands the pressures schools are facing to return to in-person learning or to stay in person. It is understood that in-person learning is ultimately best for families, and virtual learning puts enormous pressure on parents in an already difficult time. At the same time, Wisconsin remains a COVID-19 hot spot in the nation, Racine County just hit the heartbreaking milestone of 100 deaths from COVID-19, and our job is to issue recommendations that put the health of the community first. Based on the current data and experiences, if Racine Unified brings back 17,000 students, the spread of the virus could not be controlled. With that in mind, I am NOT ordering, but I am strongly recommending that schools teach virtually for the time being,” **said Dottie-Kay Bowersox, Public Health Administrator for the City of Racine.**

The Racine Public Health Department is **NOT** ordering schools to teach virtually, but as decisions are weighed by both public and private school systems, the Public Health Department wants to make the school systems and the public aware of their preference. Should school systems choose to re-open or stay open, the Health Department will continue to partner with them on their re-opening plans.

Over the past few months, the Public Health Department has been engaged with the various school systems as cases and exposure to COVID-19 continues to persist with their staff, students, and parents.

As of publication of this release:

- There have been 69 positive cases among students, teachers, and other staff within schools and related buildings within Racine Public Health Department's jurisdiction
- 27 different schools have had a positive or probable case identified in the building; this equates to approximately 2/3 (69%) of the schools within the City's jurisdiction, which include the City of Racine, Elmwood Park, and Wind Point
- There have been 6 confirmed outbreaks involving more than 20 cases:
 - Outbreaks have been tied to school related social gatherings and extracurricular sports-related activities
 - Some outbreaks have resulted in entire classrooms being transitioned to their school's "learn from home" model due to exposures

- More than 300 individuals have been exposed to a COVID-19 positive person and were or are currently required to quarantine
- Because the area's largest district is currently teaching virtually, COVID cases among school-age children within the City's jurisdiction are not increasing at the rate seen where large school districts are open for in-person instruction
- Racine County currently has a "Very High" disease activity and burden as classified by the WI Department of Health Services
- Racine County ranks 18th out of 72 WI counties for COVID-19 Case Rate per 100,000 individuals

"I understand these are difficult decisions for school leaders. At the same point, when looking at the data and contact tracing results, the recommendation to be virtual is prudent and responsible. Regardless of what schools choose to do, the City of Racine Public Health Department remains committed to supporting them during this difficult time," **Dottie-Kay Bowersox continued.**

About the City of Racine

With a population of 78,000, **Racine, Wisconsin** is the fifth largest municipality in the state of Wisconsin. It is home to manufacturing businesses that enjoy world-wide reputations, SC Johnson, CNH Industrial, Twin Disc, Modine, and In-Sink-Erator among them. Racine is also home to diverse cultures, a thriving downtown, and world-class beaches along the shores of Lake Michigan.

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