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The Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (KAAP) urges all school districts in Kansas to implement a universal mask mandate for all students, staff and visitors before the 2021-2022 school year begins.

It is critical to use science and data to guide decisions about safely returning children to the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research shows that if we follow good public health precautions there is very low spread of COVID in schools. The CDC, AAP, and the Kansas COVID Workgroup for Kids agree on the following ways to safely keep children in school:

- **Vaccinations** – students and staff should be strongly encouraged to get a COVID-19 vaccinations when it is available to them. COVID-19 vaccinations have been shown to be safe and effective in preventing infection, hospitalization, and death.
- **Universal indoor masking for all students, staff, and visitors** regardless of vaccination status. A significant portion of the student population is not eligible for vaccination, and it would be difficult for schools to monitor vaccine status among students, teachers, and staff. The low-risk quarantine criteria released in the spring semester allowed close contact exposures to remain in school if **BOTH** parties were masked. Without universal masking this year, we expect large numbers of quarantine-related school absences, excessive testing, and strain on district and school operations.

KAAP also urges families to call their pediatrician and have children caught up on all vaccines they may have missed during the pandemic. This includes getting a vaccine to protect against influenza, which like COVID-19, can cause severe illness and death. Unseasonal outbreaks of non-COVID respiratory and gastrointestinal viruses, such as RSV to name only one example, are also occurring. As students return to school, additional spread of these viruses will cause illness and lead to school absences.

Now is the time for school districts to implement universal mask mandates for all students, staff, and visitors to prevent outbreaks from keeping children out of school.

The Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (KAAP) represents more than 450 practicing pediatricians in the state. The KAAP has the fundamental goal that all children and adolescents in Kansas have the opportunity to grow safe and strong. Please contact Mel Hudelson at (913) 530-6265 for more information.