

# COVID-19 Evidenced Based Mitigation Policy

## *Northwestern Ohio Community Action Commission Head Start/Early Head Start*

---

### Mitigation Strategies

---

1. In order to reduce the spread of COVID-19, Northwestern Ohio Community Action Commission (NOCAC) Head Start mitigation strategies are guided by current recommendations of Ohio Department of Health (ODH) including each county health department in which we serve, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) our child care licensing agency. Our COVID-19 risk reduction strategies are evidenced based and will be scaled up or down based on the impacts or risks of COVID-19 in these communities.
2. County Health Departments in which NOCAC provides Head Start services:
  - a. [Defiance County Public Health](#)
  - b. [Henry County Health Department](#)
  - c. [Fulton County Health Department](#)
  - d. [Paulding County Health Department](#)
  - e. [Williams County Health Department](#)
3. Each week, the [Ohio Department of Health](#) (ODH) reports the local COVID-19 metrics . Each county health department is responsible for posting updated data on its website which includes “Community Levels” and its risk. These levels are defined in the next section.
4. The [Center for Disease Control](#) (CDC) recommendations were considered when developing this mitigation plan and referenced throughout.
5. The [Ohio Department of Job and Family Services](#), (ODJFS), Ohio’s licensing agency for all child care centers, is referenced and referred to within this policy to ensure all state requirements are adhered to.

# WHAT'S A COVID-19 COMMUNITY LEVEL?

- It's a new tool to help communities decide what prevention measures to take based on the latest data
- Every community in the United States is classified as:

### Low

Limited impact on healthcare system, low levels of severe illness

### Medium

Some impact on healthcare system, more people with severe illness

### High

High potential for healthcare system strain; high level of severe illness



[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

CS329821-B 02/25/2022

## COVID-19 Vaccination

---

- 1.** Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost has signed onto a federal lawsuit filed in Louisiana challenging the legality of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to mandate vaccines for Federal Contractors, this includes Head Start programs receiving federal funds (11/23/22). A federal district judge ruled against the Biden administration’s mandate requiring COVID-19 vaccinations for workers in the federal Head Start early education program in the case of [Louisiana v. Beccara](#) resulting in a temporary “stay” on the orders.
- 2.** The preliminary injunction by U.S. District Judge Terry A. Doughty of Monroe, La., in a challenge brought by 24 states, also blocks the mandate’s requirement that Head Start students age 2 or older wear masks while indoors or in close contact with others.
- 3.** NOCAC Head Start recognizes the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) strongly encourages all staff, contractors, and volunteers to be up-to-date on their COVID-19 vaccinations given the proven benefits for individual and community safety, including reduced incidences of severe illness, hospitalization, and death.
- 4.** NOCAC Head Start shares the latest COVID-19 vaccination information with staff and families based on the most recent evidenced based data listed on the [CDC website](#).

## Prioritizing Strategies

---

1. Per CDC, NOCAC Head Start will consider local context when developing and implementing a response to COVID-19 conditions. Factors to consider include:
  - a. Age of Population Served;
  - b. People with disabilities;
  - c. People at risk of getting very sick;
  - d. Equity;
  - e. Availability of resources;
  - f. communities served;
  - g. Pediatric-specific considerations.
  
2. **Strategy for Masking:** When community levels are “**Low**” NOCAC will support those who choose to continue to mask. When levels are “**Medium**”, persons who are immunocompromised, at risk for severe disease, or have household or social contacts at high risk for severe disease, will be encouraged to talk to their healthcare providers about whether they need to wear a mask. When levels reach “**High**”, universal masking indoors in public, regardless of vaccination status, will be promoted. Persons that are immunocompromised will be encouraged to remain at home or wear a mask designed to provide great protection, such as N95 respirator.
  
3. **Strategy for Testing:** When community levels are “**Low**” & “**Medium**” & “**High**”, NOCAC will continue to share opportunities for staff and families enrolled in our programs to utilize testing sites and free testing supplies available in our service areas. It is strongly encouraged for staff and children to get tested if they have COVID-19 symptoms or if they are in close contact with someone who does.

## Responsive to Changing Conditions

---

1. NOCAC Head Start recognizes that each of our service areas may be impacted at different times and each community level may vary. Supervisors shall reference the following guidance when determining how to respond to changing conditions at the community level in which they provide services.
  - a. Low - Business as usual.
  - b. Medium - Business as usual with a more focused look at buildings and classrooms' specific level of illness of children, staff or other people within the area.
  - c. High - NOCAC Head Start will follow the [Safe and Healthy Workplace Plan](#) outlined on our agency website. Additional guidance will be directed via the Program Director and Human Resource Director in consultation with the NOCAC Executive Director.
2. Cohorting or closure of classrooms/offices will be determined on a case by case basis. The Center Manager, Health and Safety Manager and program Director will consider all factors when deciding when to modify the number of children in attendance of a classroom or daily schedule or structure.
3. Responding to outbreaks by increasing prevention strategy (e.g., masking, screening, testing, or decreasing events where crowding exists) to reduce transmission even when Community Levels are low.

## Additional Precautions

---

1. NOCAC Head Start has extremely stringent Health and Safety Policy and Procedures, including infection control, that meet or exceed state child care licensing rules. Each policy is reviewed and updated annually and located in the employee section of our website.
2. Listed below are relevant policy and procedures as it relates to classrooms, buses and offices:
  - a. NOCAC posts proper [handwashing procedures](#) at all handwashing sinks encouraging washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If handwashing facilities are not readily available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 70% alcohol must be used.
  - b. All classrooms and offices [clean, sanitize and disinfect](#) on a regular basis. In addition to scheduled cleaning, each site has a cordless electrostatic sprayer for touchless disinfection and sanitizing capabilities to use when children are not present.
  - c. [Communicable disease](#) policies are followed to reduce the spread of infectious disease. All Head Start staff are also trained on this policy.
  - d. Children will have a [Daily Health Check](#) as they enter the bus or classroom.
  - e. [Volunteers](#), including parents, will be required to follow all NOCAC COVID-19 protocols.
3. Ventilation of NOCAC offices, buildings and classrooms can improve the air flow and potentially reduce virus particles from spreading in the air. During high incidences of illness, opening of doors and windows, if safe to do so, will be considered an option to improve air quality. Air filtration systems or exhaust fans can be used if needed. HVAC systems are maintained and filters are routinely changed.
4. Preventing community spread by staying home when sick can lower the spread to other people. If children or staff are sick with COVID-19 symptoms, they will be sent home and asked to follow up with their medical provider.

# Communication Plan

---

1. NOCAC Head Start will use the following methods of communication to reach necessary parties as it relates to our COVID-19 Mitigation Policy and spikes in COVID-19 cases in their relevant counties.
  - a. Staff will be trained on the policy annually at the Preservice staffing in the fall and any time the policy is updated.
  - b. In addition to [ClassDojo](#), children & families could be notified via phone call, written memo or in person when they pick up or drop off their child.
  - c. Community members will be advised to refer to our [nocac.org](#) webpage to familiarize themselves with our policy.
2. NOCAC staff are encouraged to notify their supervisor if they feel ventilation conditions in their workspace is unsafe.
3. The Child Development Health & Safety Manager is on the Listserv of each of the county health departments and is notified via email when community levels have changed.
4. All staff must report positive COVID-19 tests to their direct supervisor and/or NOCAC's Human Resource Manager within 24 hours.
5. This policy will be active and updated on our agency website.
6. Printed copies of this policy will be shared with the Policy Council and the NOCAC Board.
7. Our Health Services Advisory Council has contributed to the development of this Mitigation Policy.
8. This policy will be updated based on revised guidance from the CDC, ODH, ODJFS and our local health departments. If significant changes are indicated, they will be brought back to our Policy Council, Health Advisory Committee and NOCAC Board for discussion and approval.

Updated 1/19/2023

---