

COVID Delta variant an increased threat to kids; debate over vaccines and masks continues

Governor Mike DeWine, the state's director of health, and officials from Ohio's children's hospitals remain deeply concerned about the rising numbers of COVID-19 cases and the increased risk to children who are more vulnerable to the Delta variant than the original virus.

Governor DeWine and health experts continue to encourage all eligible Ohioans to get vaccinated and urge schools to implement and maintain mask mandates and social distancing.

"We are in a perfect storm, with COVID, with respiratory disease, with mental health issues," said Dr. Patty Manning-Courtney, chief clinical officer at Cincinnati Children's Hospital during a press conference hosted by the Ohio Children's Hospital Association. "This is really a reality check as we brace ourselves for the other winter viruses."

The governor has declined to issue a statewide health order requiring masks, suggesting that there is little point in doing so given the likelihood that the General Assembly – which passed legislation limiting his authority – would simply overturn it.

From mid-August to mid-September, more than 29,000 cases involving school-age children were reported. Children's hospitals have voiced concerns about staffing shortages and a lack of beds.

"Almost 40 percent of the children in our ICU today have COVID," said Dr. Adam Mezoff, chief medical officer and vice president at Dayton Children's Hospital. "These are numbers we did not see at the beginning of this pandemic. Clearly COVID has changed with the Delta variant and we are seeing sicker and sicker children."

Against that backdrop, legislation dealing with vaccine and mask mandates has been introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

On September 17, Governor DeWine announced that nearly 58 percent of Ohio's K-12 public schools require students to wear masks in school – up from only 35 percent on September 1.