



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT ♦ OFFICE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS & CENTERS
Pastoral Center ♦ PO Box 40200 ♦ St. Petersburg, FL, 33743-0200 ♦ PH: 727-347-5539 ♦ Fax: 727-341-6848

Dear Catholic School Parents and Guardians,

August 2, 2021

I pray that you and your family are enjoying your last week of summer vacation before school begins. As you are likely aware, the number of cases and positivity rates for Covid-19 in all five counties of the Diocese of St. Petersburg have increased dramatically in the past few weeks.

We had planned to enact temporary mask requirements for students between 5-12 years of age, exclusively in counties where transmission rates are high and only while those rates remained high by using the official data from the [Florida Department of Health website](#). As soon as community transmission rates would have dropped, all schools would have returned to the protocols cited in the July 13 letter (i.e. masks optional for students). However, this past Friday, July 30, Governor DeSantis signed Executive Order 21-175, "Ensuring Parents' Freedom to Choose – Masks in Schools", directing the Florida Departments of Health and Education to use all legal means available to prohibit schools from making any mask requirements. **After review of the Executive Order, we will maintain our earlier position articulated in the July 13 letter that masks will be optional for all students. All other precautionary measures will continue to be in effect.**

While there will currently be no requirement, we strongly encourage parents to have their unvaccinated children use face masks in school as long as local community transmission rates are high. We encourage every family to speak to their primary care physician about the benefits and risks of vaccinations and other preventative measures they can take to keep their family and others safe. In addition, parents are asked to err on the side of caution by keeping their children home from school and getting them tested if they are experiencing Covid-like symptoms. In general, symptoms of the Delta variant are the same as the symptoms of other Covid-19 strains: fever, dry cough, shortness of breath, temporary loss of taste or smell, flulike respiratory and digestive problems, muscle aches and fatigue.

As of this writing, rates in all five DOSP counties have increased dramatically. Parents can find this information at [Home | Florida Department of Health COVID-19 Outbreak \(floridahealthcovid19.gov\)](#) by clicking on the "Weekly Florida Covid-19 Data" button. These reports are generated weekly (not daily) and published each Friday. The past week's (July 23-July 29) statistics for our five counties follow:

County	County Population	Age 12+ vaccinated	Cases (new)	New case positivity	Cases per 100K population
Citrus	151,314.00	52%	657	21.1	434.2
Hernando	195,123.00	50%	1147	25.5	587.8
Hillsborough	1,508,560.00	57%	7124	20.5	472.2
Pasco	549,517.00	57%	2883	22.5	524.6
Pinellas	992,298.00	59%	4164	16.7	419.6

There was evidence that the earlier alpha-variant did not affect young people. The situation we currently face appears to be different. Age-related infection rates are not available by county. However, across the State of Florida during this past week, children under 12 years of age accounted for 9.8% of cases (10,785 out of 110,477) and young people from ages 12-19 accounted for 10% of cases (11,048 out of 110,477). This means that school aged children account for about 1 in 5 new cases.

We look forward to a wonderful year of Catholic education in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. With your help and support, we hope to return to a normal school year.

Sincerely in Christ,



Christopher L. Pastura
Superintendent of Catholic Schools and Centers
Diocese of St. Petersburg