



MEMORANDUM

Date: August 5, 2021

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator *CH*

Re: COVID-19 Update for the August 10, 2021 Board of Supervisors Meeting

Pandemic Update

After a nadir at the end of May which experienced 244 cases that week, the number of cases has risen during each week in July, and is now estimated at 1,098 cases the last week of July. During that time COVID-19 test positivity has increased from 3 percent the last week of May, to 9 percent last week. The increase in cases has occurred almost exclusively among the unvaccinated portions of our population, impacting predominantly the 15 to 19 and 20 to 40 age groups.

Variants of concern, including the Alpha and Delta variants, have been detected among 68 percent of the specimens forwarded to the State for variant analysis as part of our limited surveillance. Among these Alpha and Delta variants continues to predominate and is identified in 59 percent of positive tests that are sequenced. Notably, the Delta variant in Pima County has increased every week since mid-June. National surveillance has identified Delta as the predominant variant in the U.S., and that is likely to happen here locally in the very near future. We have become aware that the State Health Department will be unveiling a landing page reporting on variant distribution and we will transmit that information to the Board as soon as it is available.

COVID-19 infections occurring among fully vaccinated individuals (breakthrough infections) remain a small but concerning fraction of the cases occurring in Pima County. At this time, they represent 0.1 percent (648 of 549,178) of all cases diagnosed in this community. What is more concerning, is that the number of breakthrough cases has doubled from 122 in June to 253 in July, probably reflecting the impact of the more transmissible variants now circulating in this community. What is also clear from our review of local data is that even when breakthrough cases occur, hospitalization (0.2 percent or 16 of 7,480) and death (0.08 percent 2 of 2,459) are extremely rare among the vaccinated population. It bears repeating that COVID-19 vaccination remains the most important tool that needs to be leveraged in our pandemic response if we are to prevent needless hospitalizations and deaths in Pima County.

Hospital Capacity

Our Health Department monitors hospital capacity on a daily basis, by calling each facility within the jurisdiction to assess current volumes in the inpatient medical surgical units and in intensive care. This voluntary self-reporting by our partner hospitals has been invaluable for the regional management of precious hospital resources.

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COVID-19 positive inpatients peaked at 760 on January 7 of this year, and had been steadily declining to its lowest point on May 29 with 34 inpatients reported that day. Inpatients had remained relatively flat, but are now consistently increasing. Most recently COVID-19 inpatients peaked on July 30 at 97 inpatients that day.

COVID-19 ICU bed usage reached its peak of 343 on January 11, 2021, reaching its lowest occupancy of 14 on May 21 and leveling off in the low twenties. This last week, COVID-19 ICU patients have ranged from 30 to 37 per day.

At this time hospital capacity is not expected to be an issue, but we remain vigilant of the overall impact the increased number of cases is having on the overall delivery of health care services throughout Pima County.

Pediatric Population Update

Approximately 19,863 COVID-19 cases have occurred in the population of 0 to 19 year olds in Pima County. This represents just over 16 percent cases of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. (Please note that a statistical coding error led us to overstate the fraction of cases in this age group in my prior memorandum of July 13.)

Similarly, there were 7,567 hospitalizations of Pima County residents since the onset of the pandemic, but only 3 percent have occurred in the 0 to 19 age group. Significantly, there have been no COVID-19 related deaths in this age group among Pima County residents.

The dynamics of infections among young people have followed those of the community at large, peaking in early January 2021 and now waning. (This level of detail is provided by week and month in Attachment 1 for the entire course of the pandemic.)

The rate of infection among young people may be changing however, as the return to school will bring back thousands of unvaccinated children into school environments that are now limited in their ability to require universal mandatory masking through the recent actions of the Governor and the State Legislature as part of the conclusion of the budgetary process. The Health Department's estimate of the population with at least a single dose of vaccine suggest that only 26 percent of the 10 to 14-year population and 49 percent of 15 to 19-year population have received at least a single dose of vaccine. Since the start of the school year and related summer athletic training activities, schools have reported 85 cases of COVID-19 in the month of July.

Recognizing the vulnerability of unvaccinated youth in the COVID-19 pandemic and given the difficult position that schools find themselves regarding the mixed messaging on mitigation from the State, the Pima Health Department updated its guidance to schools as they start the new academic year. (Attachment 2). This document emphasizes the critical role of vaccination for age-eligible children, as well as families, faculty and staff. Consistent with the [CDC guidance](#) for COVID-19 prevention in K-12 schools, it also stresses the need for consistent and correct face covering use by unvaccinated individuals, including all children less than 12 years of age. At my direction, and in consultation with the County Attorney's

staff, Dr. Theresa Cullen has provided all school districts (and subsequently charter and private schools) a legal order clarifying the legal authority the Health Department will exercise to protect the health and well-being of the children in Pima County. (Attachment 3) Of note, the order was updated on August 4, 2021 to correct a scrivener's error.

Vaccine Coverage

Though progress has significantly slowed in the last two months, Pima County continues to make steady improvement in COVID-19 vaccination coverage. Indeed, in every age category currently reported by the CDC COVID-19 Data Tracker, Pima County continues to have better coverage than the State and the Nation.

Population Percent with Partial (1-dose) and Full COVID Vaccine Coverage by Age threshold for Pima County, Arizona and the U.S.

	<i>Partial (1-dose) Coverage</i>			<i>Complete (Full) Coverage</i>		
	Pima County	Arizona	United States	Pima County	Arizona	United States
≥12 years	70.1%	62.7%	67.9%	61.1%	53.3%	58.3%
≥18 years	72.1%	65%	70.2%	63.3%	55.7%	60.7%
≥65 years	93.8%	86.1%	90.1%	84.1%	74.5%	80.2%
Total population Vaccinated	60.7% (635,758)	53.5% (3,893,533)	58% (165,614,017)	52.9% (553,852)	45.5% (3,309,350)	49.8% (165,334,987)

To date the strategy of micro-targeting census tracts, schools, and community organizations continues to reach the unvaccinated segments of our county. Through this effort the Health Department and its partners have conducted more than 455 mobile and pop-up events that have reached nearly 40,000 individuals across our community. One indicator that these mobile efforts are reaching the underserved population is evidenced by the racial/ethnic breakdown of those served by these efforts (48 percent Hispanic, 37 percent White, 4 percent African American, 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian).

Per the Arizona State Department of Health Services, Pima County has the second highest vaccination coverage (after Santa Cruz County). It also reports a significantly more diverse vaccinated population compared to the rest of the state; reporting Pima County vaccine recipients as 42 percent are white, 22 percent Hispanic, 2 percent African American and 2 percent American Indian.

Our own data confirm that first dose coverage exceeds the 60 percent threshold for every ten-year age group beginning at 30. The reservoir of unvaccinated population remains the

lower age groups, with only 26 percent of 10-14, 49 percent of 15-19, and 47 percent of 20-29 year olds having the lowest first dose vaccination rates.

Conclusion

It is clear Pima County is experiencing its fourth surge. This one associated with the return to school exacerbated by the continued loosening of personal mitigation practices, and the circulation of viral variants especially among the unvaccinated fractions of the community. Despite this, the Health Department's steady progress in vaccination will likely mean that the impact on hospitals is likely to be more modest compared to the holiday surge. The policy question that confronts the Board is whether reinstatement of the emergency declaration is merited by the current state of the pandemic. Such a declaration would be largely symbolic, since the recent actions of the governor and the legislature have effectively eliminated most of the public health tools that could be brought to bear by Pima County.

Given that reality, at this time, our only recourse is to redouble our efforts to vaccinate as much of the population in Pima County willing to accept this intervention, and to continue to call for consistent mask use indoors especially among the unvaccinated for their own protection and the protection of immune-compromised and 0 to 11 years of age who cannot yet be vaccinated.

CHH/dym

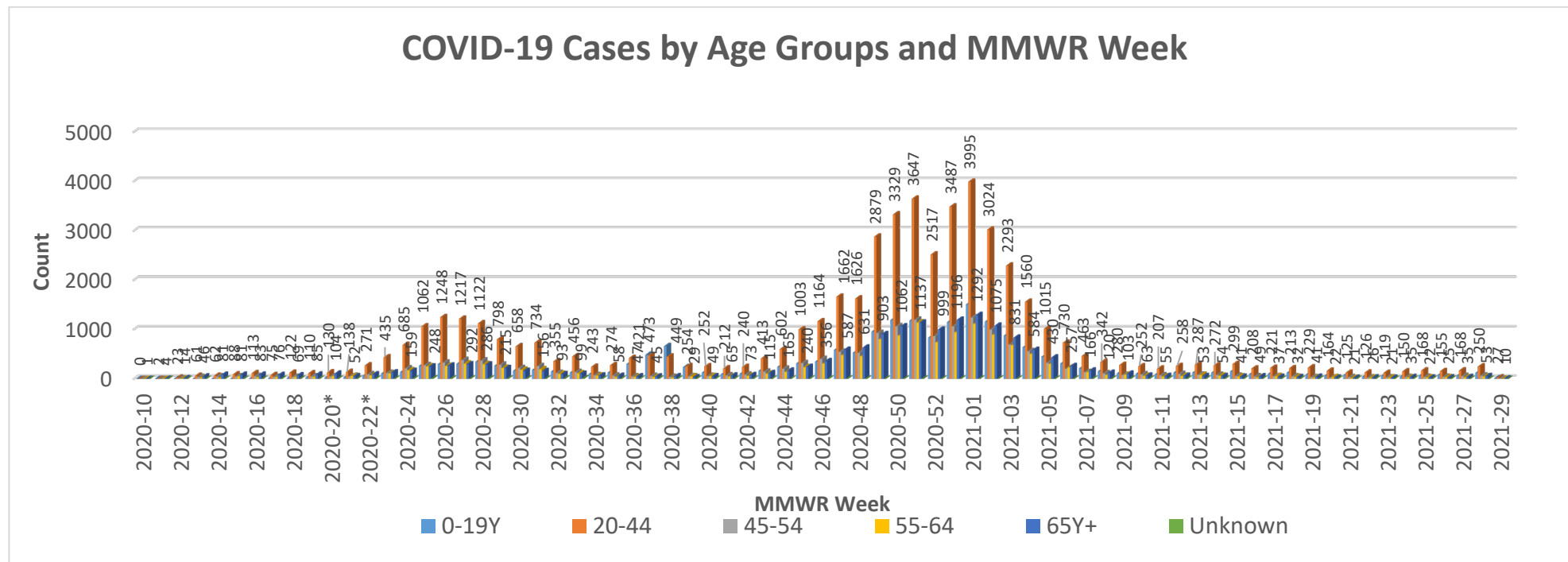
Attachments

c: Jan Leshner, Chief Deputy County Administrator
Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,
Health and Community Services
Theresa Cullen, MD, MS, Director, Health Department

ATTACHMENT 1

Demographics of Pima County COVID-19 Cases by MMWR Week

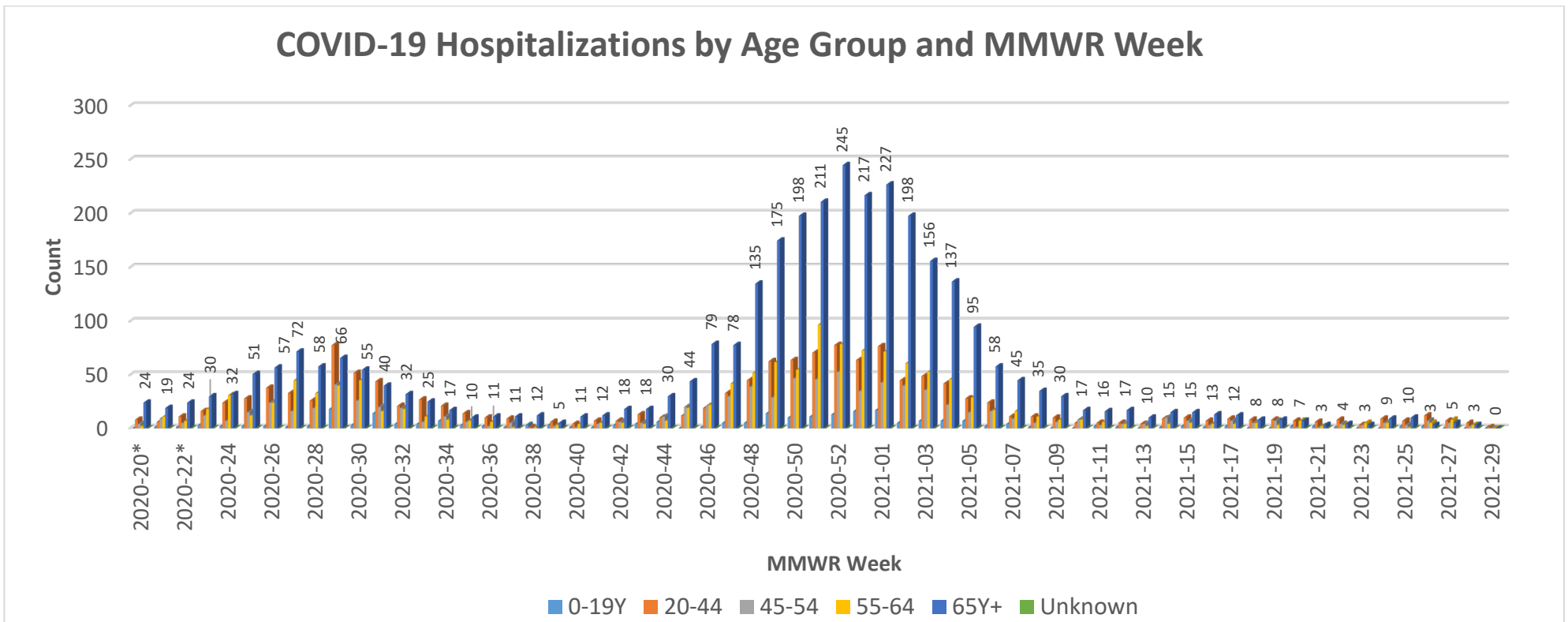
Chart 1: Pima County COVID-19 Cases by Age Groups and MMWR Week



2020-20* (Stay at Home Order Lifted): 5/10/20-5/16/20—**2020-21**: 5/17/20-5/23/20—**2020-22** (Memorial Day): 5/24/20-5/30/20—**2020-23**: 5/31/20-6/6/20—**2020-24**: 6/7/20-6/13/20—**2020-25*** (Mandatory masks): 6/14/20-6/20/20—**2020-26**: 6/21/20-6/27/20—**2020-27**: 6/28/20-7/4/20—**2020-28**: 7/5/20 – 7/11/20—**2020-29**: 7/12/20-7/18/20—**2020-30**: 7/19/20 – 7/25/20—**2020-31**: 7/26/20 – 8/1/20—**2020-32**: 8/2/20 – 8/8/20—**2020-33**: 8/9/20-8/15/20—**2020-34**: 8/16/20-8/22/20—**2020-35**: 8/23/20 – 8/29/20—**2020-36**: 8/30/20 – 9/5/20—**2020-37*** (Labor Day): 9/6/20 – 9/12/20—**2020-38**: 9/13/20 – 9/19/20—**2020-39**: 9/20/20-9/26/20—**2020-40**: 9/27/20-10/3/20—**2020-41**: 10/4/20-10/10/20—**Week 42**: 10/11/20-10/17/20-- **Week 43**: 10/18/20 – 10/24/20--**Week 44**: 10/25/20-10/31/20—**Week 45**: 11/1/20-11/7/20—**Week 46**: 11/8/20-11/14/20—**Week 47**: 11/15/20-11/21/20—**2020-48**: 11/22/20-11/28/20—**2020-49**: 11/29/20-12/5/20—**2020-50**: 12/6/20-12/12/20—**2020-51*** (Curfew/Vaccine-Phase 1A): 12/13/20-12/19/20—**2020-52**: 12/20/20 – 12/26/20—**2020-53**: 12/27/20-1/2/21—**2021-01**: 1/3/21-1/9/21—**2021-02*** (Vaccine-Phase 1B): 1/10/21-1/16/21—**2021-03**: 1/17/21-1/23/21—**2021-04**: 1/24/21-1/30/21—**2021-05**: 1/31/21-2/6/21--**2021-06*** (Super Bowl): 02/7/21-2/13/21—**2021-07**: 2/14/21-2/20/21—**2021-08**: 2/21/21-2/27/21—**2021-09**: 2/28/21-3/6/21—**2021-10**: 3/7/21-3/13/21—**2021-11**: 3/14/21-3/20/21—**2021-12**: 3/21/21-3/27/21—**2021-13**: 3/28/21-4/3/21—**2021-14**: 4/4/21-4/10/21—**2021-15**: 4/11/21-4/17/21—**2021-16**: 4/18/21-4/24/21—**2021-17**: 4/25/21-5/1/21—**2021-18**: 5/2/21-5/8/21—**2021-19**: 5/9/21-5/15/21—**2021-20**: 5/16/21-5/22/21 -- **2021-21**: 5/23/21 – 5/29/21 -- **2021-22**: 5/30/21 – 6/5/21 -- **2021-23**: 6/6/21 – 6/12/21 **2021-24**: 6/13/21 – 6/19/21 -- **2021-25**: 6/20/21 – 6/26/21 **2021-26**: 6/27/21 – 7/3/21 **2021-27**: 7/4/21 – 7/10/21 -- **2021-28**: 7/11/21 – 7/17/21 -- **2021-29**: 7/18/21 – 7/24/21

Demographics of COVID-19 Hospitalizations by MMWR Week

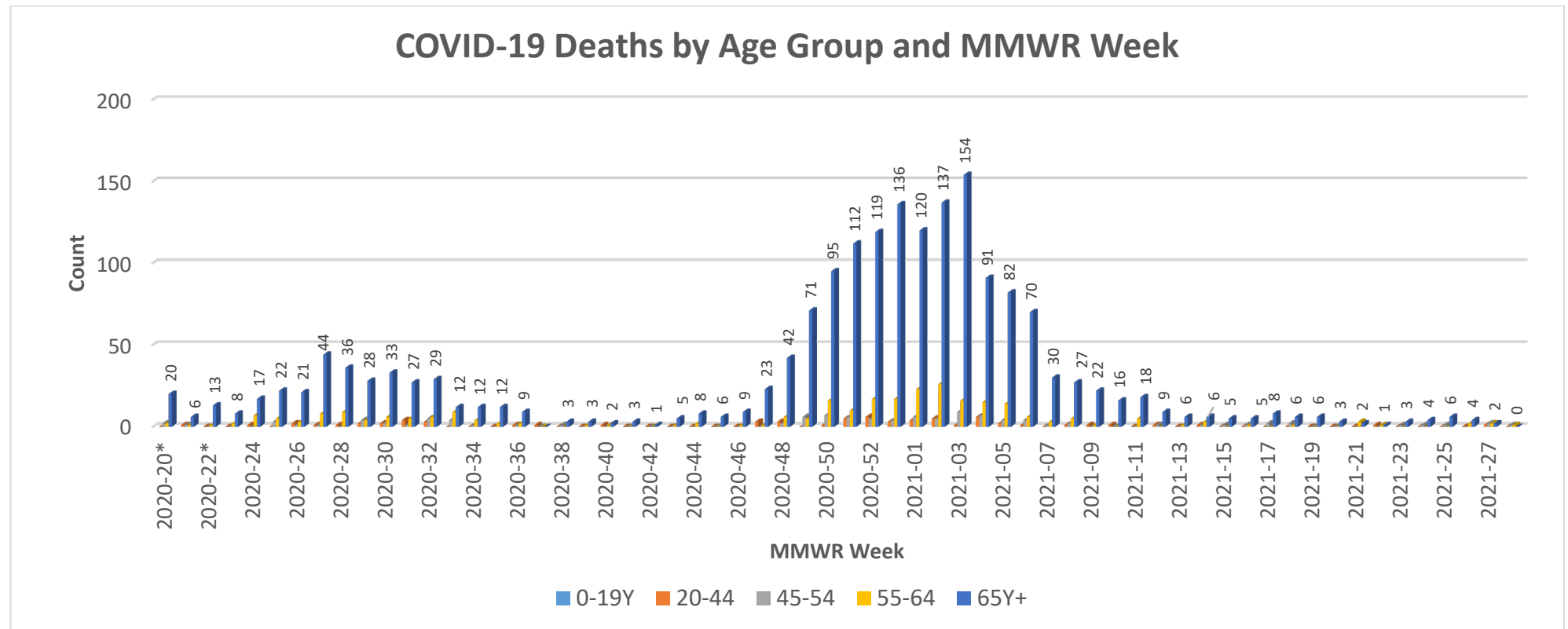
Chart 2: Pima County COVID-19 Hospitalizations by Age Group and MMWR Week



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Demographics of COVID-19 Deaths by MMWR Week

Chart 3: Pima County COVID-19 Deaths by Age Group and MMWR Week

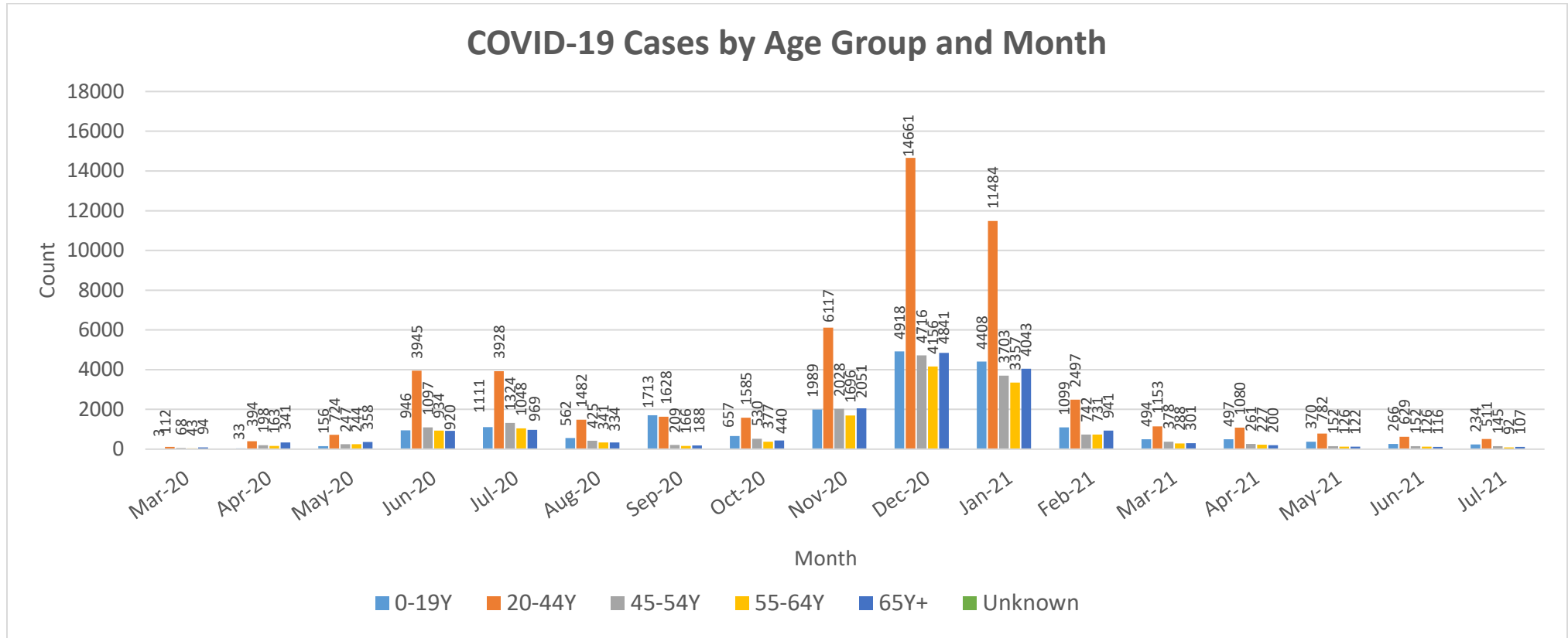


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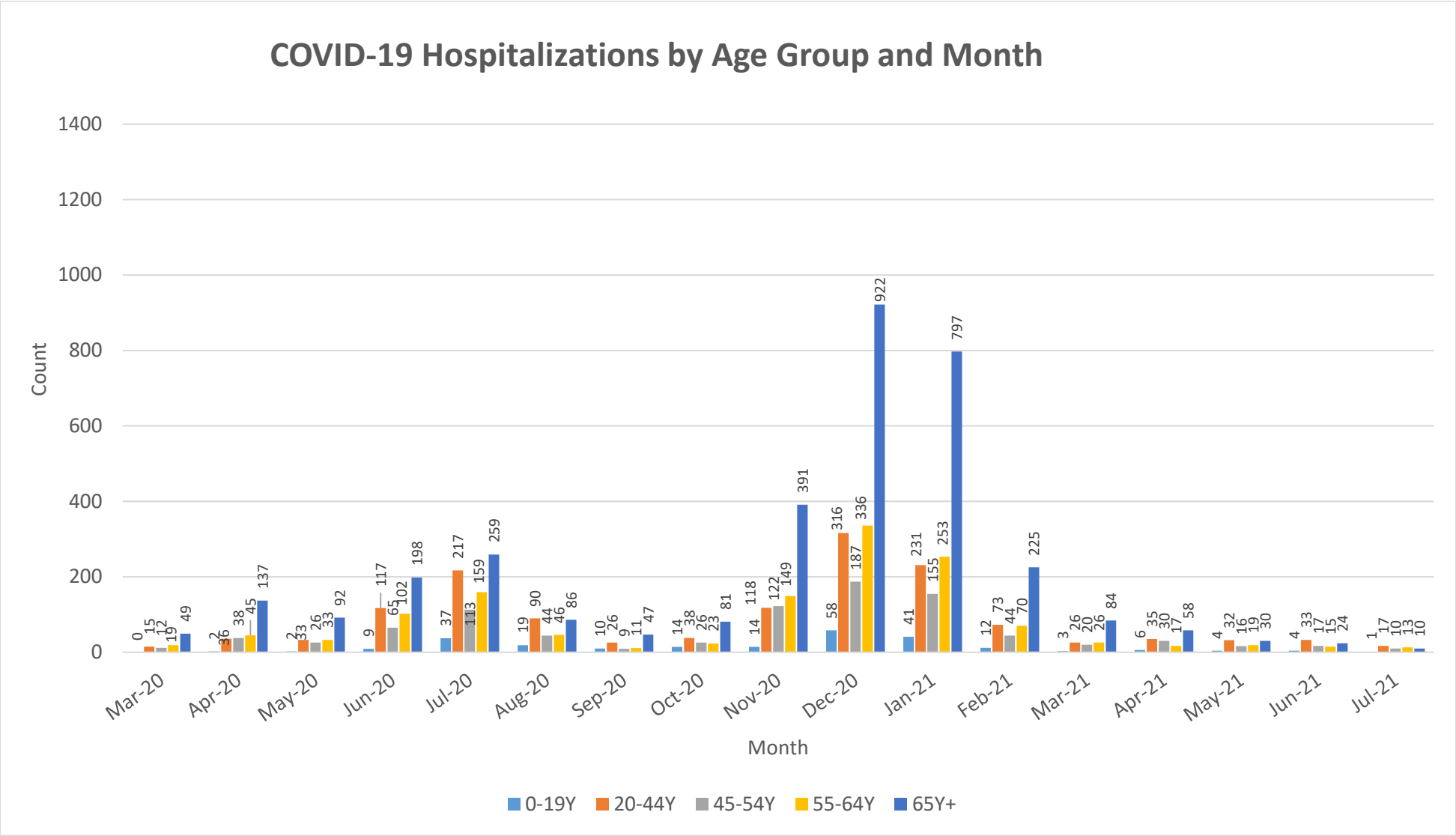


Pima County COVID-19 Demographics

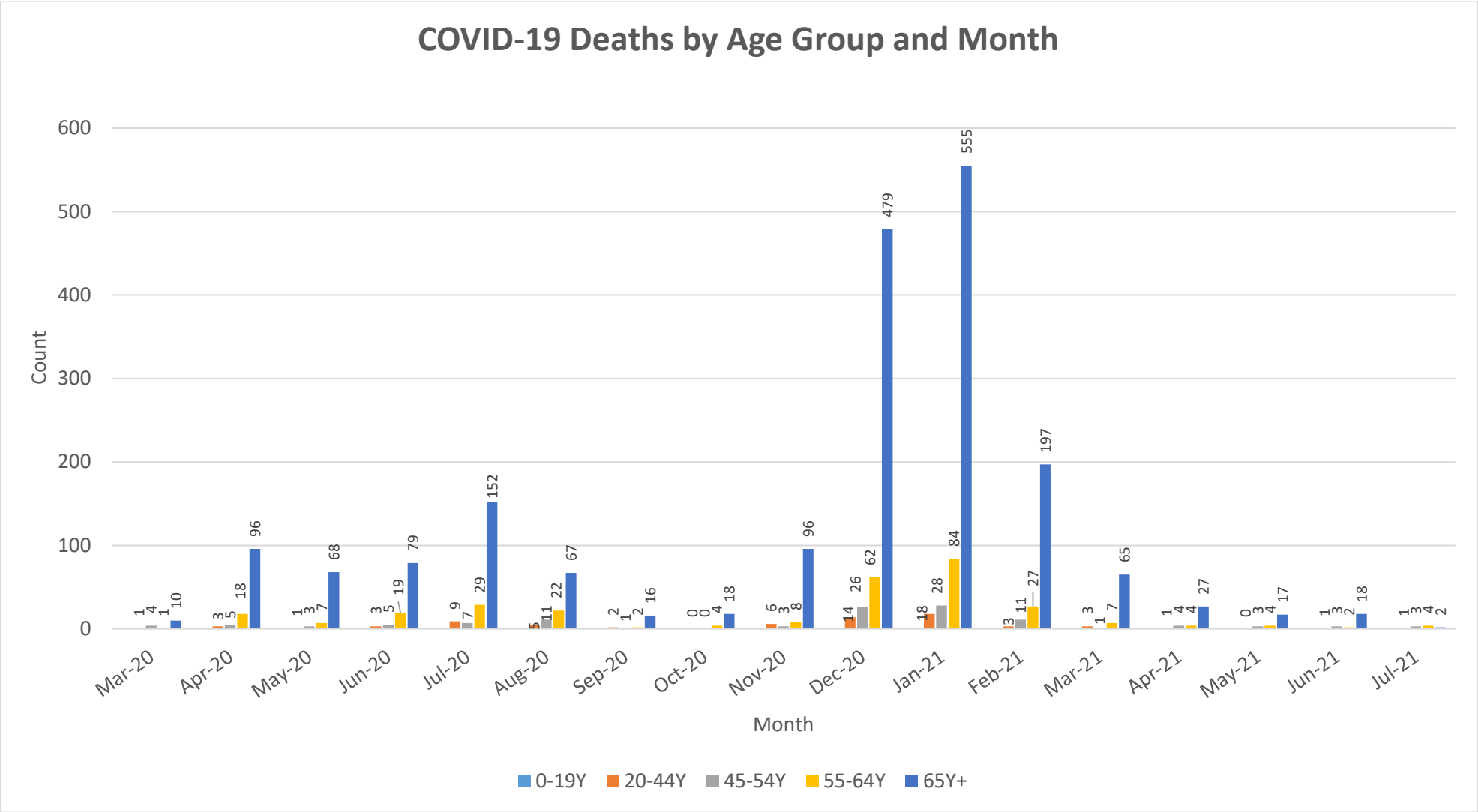
Demographics of COVID-19 Cases by Month



Demographics of Hospitalized COVID-19 Cases by Month



Demographics of COVID-19 Deaths by Month



ATTACHMENT 2



Pima County 2021-2022 School Year COVID-19 Recommendations for K-12 Schools

PCHD strongly recommends that people who have **not** been vaccinated get the vaccine.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Maintain at least **3 feet** of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing to reduce transmission.

When **3 feet** of physical distance can't be maintained, layer other prevention strategies, such as:

- Staying home when sick with symptoms of infectious illness including COVID-19
- Indoor masking
- Testing
- Grouping students into cohorts
- Improved ventilation
- Handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes,
- Regular cleaning to help reduce transmission risk

A distance of at least **6 feet** is recommended between students and teachers/staff, and between teachers/staff who are not fully vaccinated (CDC, 2021)

MASKS

All staff and students 5 years or older should wear masks indoors unless medical or developmental conditions prohibit their use regardless of vaccination status. (CDC, July 27, 2021)

In general, people do not need to

wear masks when outdoors. The CDC recommends that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people who are not fully vaccinated. Pima County is currently in substantial COVID-19 transmission. (CDC, 2021)

FOOD

There are currently no restrictions on:

- Food preparation (outside of food handling guidelines and safety)
- Cafeteria (hot and cold food)
- Paying for and scanning lunch cards
- Staff eating areas and breakrooms
- Staff pot lucks
- High school lunches

TESTING

PCHD supports the use of BINAX in schools for testing symptomatic contacts and recommends working with the state-approved vendor to implement pooled testing.

POSITIVE CASES*

PCHD will conduct the contact tracing and case investigation for positive cases. The ability to conduct

contact tracing is contingent upon schools providing a list of "close contacts" along with information needed to communicate with these individuals.

What's a close contact?

- Anyone within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.
- An infected person can spread Covid-19 starting from 2 days before they have any symptoms (or 2 days before the positive specimen collection date) until they meet criteria for discontinuing home isolation.
- Continued isolation and quarantine recommendations will be provided by PCHD through contact tracing and case investigation. PCHD will initiate contact tracing.
- PCHD will provide logistical support to schools who would like to provide on-site vaccination events.



Wear a mask regardless of your vaccination status.

ATTACHMENT 3



Updated August 4, 2021

**PIMA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
SANITARY MEASURE 2021-01
(*Slowing the Spread of COVID-19 in Schools*)**

WHEREAS, the World Health Organization officially declared a pandemic due to COVID-19 on March 11, 2020; and

WHEREAS, prompt detection of cases and their close contacts, followed by rapid implementation of infection control measures, is necessary to control the spread of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the Pima County Health Department has identified an accelerated transmission of COVID-19 throughout Pima County, including the increasing presence of the much more transmissible Delta variant; and

WHEREAS, any surge in cases will disproportionately impact unvaccinated people, among them children; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) Emergency Measure 2020-03, administrators of schools must submit a report to the local health department within 24 hours of the identification of an outbreak of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to A.R.S. § 36-624, a county health department may adopt quarantine and sanitary measures to prevent the spread of an infectious or contagious disease within its jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to A.R.S. § 36-630, any person who violates such a measure is guilty of a class 3 misdemeanor;

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED:

1. All schools within the jurisdiction of Pima County must report all positive cases of COVID- 19 to the Pima County Health Department.
2. Once identified, all known or suspected cases must be sent home as soon as possible.

3. Within 24 hours of confirmation of a case by the Pima County Health Department, schools must provide the names and contact information for individuals who were within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes of the confirmed case during a 24-hour period ("close contacts").
4. Individuals who are confirmed cases must isolate for ten days; release from isolation occurs after ten days as long as the individual is asymptomatic.
5. Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated close contacts must remain at home and be excluded from school and extra-curricular activities. Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated close contacts who remain asymptomatic may return on or after day seven upon providing documentation of a valid negative COVID-19 test collected on or after day 5 of the quarantine.
6. Close contacts who can provide documentation of a completed COVID-19 vaccination series may return to school immediately if asymptomatic. Completed vaccination means 14 days from having received a single Janssen/J&J vaccine or the second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. Individuals who are vaccinated should test for COVID-19 between day 3 and 5 of their exposure to someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, as well as continue to mask.

ORDERED ON THIS 30th DAY OF JULY, 2021



BY THERESA CULLEN, M.D.
DIRECTOR, PIMA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT