



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP)

William Clay Brown, MD

Local Health Authority

Mary Beth Bess, RN, MSN, FNP-BC

Health Services Director

Kevin D. Crump, AAS

PHEP Coordinator

Public Health Statement Issued August 5, 2020

Chambers County Public Health issued recommendations for the reopening of local school districts on August 3, 2020 directly to Superintendents and School Boards, urging them to take further action to protect their staff and students by delaying in-person instruction until September 8, 2020 (at the earliest).

Further, local health authority W. Clay Brown warned that reopening now could cause further widespread transmission of COVID-19 in Chambers County.

“Local school districts have done all that they can to prepare for the upcoming school year. Each District has submitted detailed opening plans with attention to safety and mitigation measures for students and staff. These Superintendents and planning committees truly have the best interests of staff and students at heart,” said Dr. W. Clay Brown.

With sustained widespread community transmission, however, Chambers County Public Health warns that planned measures will likely not be enough. Recently updated CDC guidance advises that schools can safely begin to reopen in-person when community transmission is low.

“In-person instruction is vital for the educational development and social well-being of children and young adults,” continued Dr. Brown. “However, right now it is likely inevitable that in-person instruction would lead to a new wave of exposures, hospitalizations and school closures.”

The Regional Hospital System is near capacity, as evidenced by their daily reporting system, which our rural county depends on heavily for a higher level of healthcare.

“We aren’t just concerned for the safety of students and teachers,” said Dr. Brown, “we are concerned for the entire community.” “Although in most cases young children are less severely affected by COVID-19, they are capable of transmitting the virus. This transmission will lead to an increase in school exposures, cases, and transmission to parents, siblings, and extended families. This exponential increase

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in exposures or cases will lead to ongoing classroom quarantines, school closures, and further strain our Regional Healthcare system.”

Alternatively, Chambers County Public Health recommends:

- Delaying in-person, face-to-face instruction until at least September 8 (pending ongoing review of data trends)
- School boards working with local and state governments as well as community partners to accommodate families who lack internet access or devices, by providing the necessary tools to ensure access to remote learning
- All school-sponsored events and activities be suspended at least until school systems resume in-person instruction

The goal of Chambers County Public Health is to protect the health and well-being of the residents of Chambers County.

“We know that school districts have the same goals as Public Health: to preserve, promote and protect the health of their staff and students,” said Dr. Brown

“Here in Chambers County, our Districts have autonomy regarding the decision to open” continued Dr. Brown, “but ultimately our hope is that the school districts will strongly consider Public Health predictions, recommendations, and concerns when making decisions, due to the sustained widespread transmission of COVID-19 in Chambers County.”

The Public Health Department stands ready to assist and support our schools in every way possible, whatever their decision regarding delaying in-person opening. We are increasing staff and will provide monitoring, epidemiologic investigations, contact tracing, and any other assistance that may be required.

Questions regarding this guidance should be directed in the following manner:

- Health-Related Questions: 409-267-2731
- General Questions: 409-267-2440
- Media Inquiries: 409-267-2695

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