

As the Pelham Health officer, I have worked closely with the State Department of Health over the past 14 months, to track the numbers and the trends in Pelham and we as a community continue to be part of the highest number clusters in NH for Covid-19. Although we are seeing the number currently in a downward trend we continue to be in the 1 of 2 clusters in NH with the highest rates and it doesn't help that we are a border town to Massachusetts. I have received many inquiries about "Pelham's number now being so low", so why do we still have restrictions? Please keep in mind that these numbers only reflect the cases the state receives of people that have been tested and are positive, and does not include those that are ill and not tested or reported or A-symptomatic.

To address the desire to have masks optional in the elementary school, please let me be very clear that the CDC, DHHS and myself are not in favor of removing masks from children in the classroom. We want to keep the children in school and removing masks at this stage of the pandemic could set us way back. Yes, children as a whole do not seem to get very ill, but not all children. There are thousands that are getting covid-19 and have prolonged effects from then presenting with Multi inflammatory disease, and hundreds who are sick enough to be hospitalized.

Just because it doesn't affect you personally, it is having an effect on many others around you. In addition, please keep in mind that children under 12 years old do not have the option to be vaccinated. At this time last year, we were seeing very few if any children getting sick, now we see hundreds of them in every county. This is where science comes in, so let me explain . The virus needs a host to survive. To do this it will mutate, as we have seen, and change in any way possible to be able to

attach to any host available. So if adults are all getting vaccinated and they no longer can survive on that host, it will change and find another, and that is why what we are seeing is so prevalent in children. Not only will it attack another host, but as time goes it will get stronger and more contagious, as we have seen with the UK variant. When it mutated it became 70X more contagious than the original strain. So it's been a race against the clock and continues to be, until we can get more people vaccinated. And, if for no other reason, do it to protect the children w/ asthma, chronic lung disease, diabetes and obesity. Many may not know this, but childhood obesity is a very high risk factor for getting seriously ill from Covid-19, and our country is currently experiencing a high rate of childhood obesity and we see it everyday even in our town of Pelham. Our schools take great pride in protecting children from other things such as peanut allergies so why wouldn't we continue to take measures to protect them from Covid-19 especially knowing it is only temporary. So for these reasons and many others it's important to continue to practice mitigation, which includes masks and social distancing.

So what does this mean for other adults if children aren't wearing masks? As for teachers, there may be some that may not have the option to be vaccinated, so infected children who could be asymptomatic, without a mask could get them sick, Children could unknowingly bring COVID-19 home to other members of their household who may be at higher risk and make them sick as well. Yes I understand that people feel they should have the right to decide whether they want to wear a mask, but it is about doing what is right to protect others.

What we do know is masks work. Back on Feb 10<sup>th</sup> 2021, a CDC study found that 2 people wearing a mask blocks aerosol exposure by more than 95%. But we also know that no one type of mitigation is perfect. That's why we have to layer our mitigation to include social distancing and vaccinations to create a barrier and stop the spread of Covid-19. If scientific evidence tells us that if not all people are vaccinated, we should not be having large gatherings inside due to the potential for the event to become a super spreader, then we need to consider classrooms as large gatherings.

Finally, we understand the concern over a child's resistance to wearing masks can be trying. We have been doing so for quite sometime and during my observational walks in the schools with Superintendent McGee, the children seem to have adjusted well. It is our suggestion for the parents to encourage their children to hang in there for just a little while longer. Please explain to them that this is hopefully a short-lived situation and that the school year is coming to an end.

With any luck the country will get emergency authorization for the vaccine for all children by the end of summer, and school will be able to resume next fall with some normalcy.

As for what type of markers we are looking for to finally be rid of all restrictions, it starts with a downward trend in daily numbers of positive cases, which is why we are now seeing some relief of restrictions for those vaccinated, also an upward trend in those getting vaccinated, and finally, having the numbers of positive cases being

under 10 per day for consecutive weeks. And we have not seen that yet in the state of NH.

Fighting a pandemic is a process, and this is a process that is proven to work. It is important to remember that we need to make decisions about a pandemic based on science and not emotions, and science tells us that we are not out of the woods yet. So at this point, we ask to keep the masks on the children and for the public to continue to be patient for a little while longer. Let the experts and science lead our ability to finally rid us of this virus once and for all. Believe me when I say, there is a light at the end of the tunnel and it is coming very soon.

Regards,

Karen McGlynn