

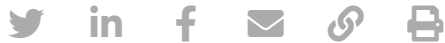


COVID-19

EDUCATION

Children's rights group calls for all Michigan school boards to issue mask mandates

BY: **SUSAN J. DEMAS** - AUGUST 25, 2021 4:21 PM



 Detroit Public Schools Community District student at Ronald Brown Academy. DPSCD has a mask mandate. | Ken Coleman

More Michigan school districts and counties have been announcing mask mandates as COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations for children are rising with the spread the highly contagious Delta variant. Kids under 12 are not yet eligible to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

On Wednesday, [Michigan's Children](#), a Lansing-based nonprofit advocating for children and families, urged all of the state's 891 school boards to "do their job and act to ensure school safety through effective mask-wearing by students and staff" to ensure a safe start to the 2021-22 school year.

The group notes that 1.4 million schoolchildren are returning to the classroom "against a [politically charged](#) landscape and rising infections due to the deadly coronavirus."

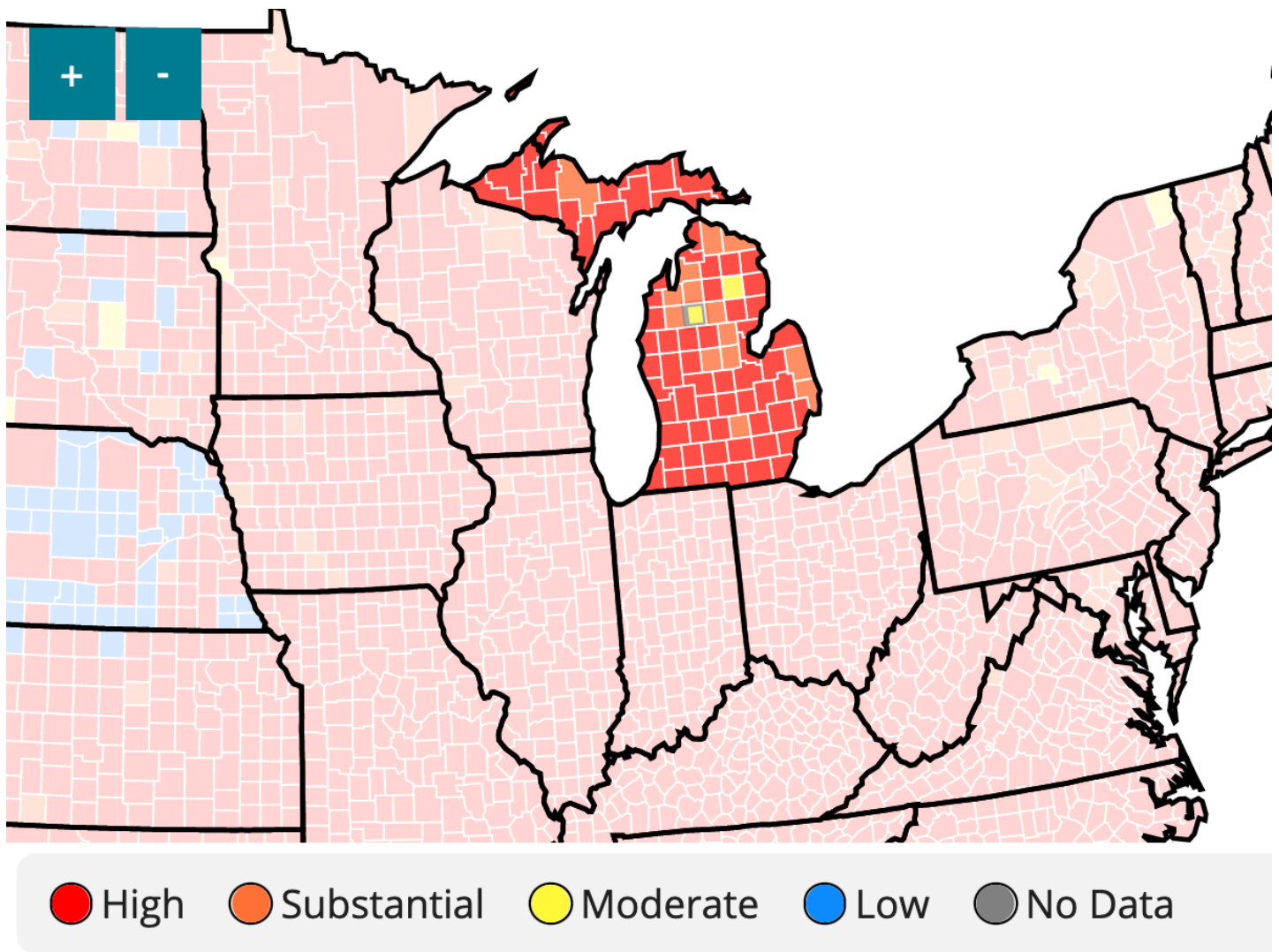
Large school districts with mask mandates include Detroit, Lansing and Grand Rapids.

"Nonpartisan, locally elected school board members hold the gravest responsibility to set policies that protect the wellbeing and health of our children during school hours. All politics aside, they hold our children's safety in their hands, and we're counting on them to act wisely and with courage," said President and CEO Matt Gillard.

"With no personal gain to themselves, these are individuals who have committed themselves through countless hours and personal sacrifice to serve the children and families of their communities. Michigan's Children fully supports those who have taken action to enact mask-wearing policies that are proven to prevent the spread and infection of COVID-19 and any variants, and implores those who have not yet done so to act immediately," Gillard continued.

Medical experts from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), the [Michigan Department of Health and Human Services](#) (DHHS), and the [Michigan Association of Family Physicians](#), among others, are urging that masks be required in schools.

Michigan does not have a statewide mask mandate for schools, unlike several other states, including [California](#), [Delaware](#), [Hawaii](#), [Illinois](#), [Louisiana](#), [New Jersey](#), [New York](#), [Oregon](#), [Virginia](#), and [Washington](#). Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, the state's chief medical executive and chief deputy health director, has encouraged Gov. Gretchen Whitmer to issue one. Whitmer said this week she backs school boards mandating masks in schools.



Michigan COVID-19 transmission level by county, Aug. 25, 2021 | CDC map

According to CDC guidance, people in [81 of 83 Michigan counties](#) as of Wednesday should mask up indoors or outdoors when social distancing isn't possible because of high or substantial COVID-19 transmission. Only Oscoda and Missaukee are in the moderate level.

On Tuesday evening, Oakland County's health division issued an emergency health order requiring masks in daycares and elementary, middle, high and vocational schools, regardless of vaccination status, to prevent the spread of COVID-19. There are 28 school districts in Michigan second most populated county and the order also applies to charter schools.

"Our top priority is keeping students in school for in-person learning. Masking is one of the best defenses against increased transmission of COVID and higher hospitalization rates among kids," Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter said. "This order allows teachers to get back to educating our students and focusing on their success."

Allegan, Genesee, Kent, Ottawa and Kalamazoo counties also have school mask mandates. However, state Reps. Thomas Albert (R-Lowell), Mark Huizenga (R-Walker), Steven Johnson (R-Wayland) and Bryan Posthumus (R-Cannon Twp.) have [threatened](#) to pull funding from the Kent County Health Department over the school mask mandate.

Michigan's Children notes that boards in many districts have issued mask requirements even "when political pressure and opposition has been organized and vigorously mounted."

"This has to be an all-in approach to ensure that all kids, those who are immunocompromised and those under 12 who are not yet vaccinated, remain disease free," Gillard said. "Health officials tell us that anything less will lead to unnecessary infections of children as well as continued and widespread school closings that negatively interfere with students' education. No one wants that."



REPUBLIC

Our stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. We ask that you edit only for style or to shorten, provide proper attribution and link to our web site. Please see our republishing guidelines for use of photos and graphics.



SUSAN J. DEMAS  

Susan J. Demas is a 21-year journalism veteran and one of the state's foremost experts on Michigan politics, appearing on MSNBC, CNN, NPR and WKAR-TV's "Off the Record." In addition to serving as Editor-in-Chief, she is the Advance's chief columnist, writing on women, LGBTQs, the state budget, the economy and more. Most recently, she served as Vice President of Farough & Associates, Michigan's premier political communications firm. For almost five years, Susan was the Editor and Publisher of Inside Michigan Politics, the most-cited political newsletter in the state. Susan's award-winning political analysis has run in more than 80 national, international and regional media outlets, including the Guardian U.K., NBC News, the New York Times, the Detroit News and MLive. She is the only Michigan journalist to be named to the Washington Post's list of "Best Political Reporters," the Huffington Post's list of "Best Political Tweeters" and the Washington Post's list of "Best Political Bloggers." Susan was the recipient of a prestigious Knight Foundation fellowship in nonprofits and politics. She served as Deputy Editor for MIRS News and helped launch the Michigan Truth Squad, the Center for Michigan's fact-checking project. She started her journalism career reporting on the Iowa caucuses for The (Cedar Rapids) Gazette. Susan has hiked over 4,000 solo miles across four continents and climbed more than 70 mountains. She also enjoys dragging her husband and two teenagers along, even if no one else wants to sleep in a tent anymore.

MORE FROM AUTHOR

RELATED NEWS



'Kids know we are putting them at risk for political...

BY ANNA GUSTAFSON



Special report: Dozens of members of Congress are...

BY LAURA OLSON

STORIES THAT MOVE YOU

DEMOCRACY TOOLKIT



Corporate media aren't cutting it. The Michigan Advance is a nonprofit outlet featuring hard-hitting reporting on politics and policy and the best progressive commentary in the state.

[Ethics Policy](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)



Our stories may be republished online or in print under Creative Commons licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. We ask that you edit only for style or to shorten, provide proper attribution and link to our web site.

