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Roanoke City & Alleghany Health Districts Issue Guidance to Help Minimize the Risk of Transmission in K-12 Schools

(ROANOKE, Va.) – School officials and public health officials share a strong commitment to keeping children in school. And we need to do this while ensuring that K-12 school staff, administrators, and the children that they serve are able to work and learn in settings that minimize the risks to their health.

We are currently at record high community transmission rates in the Roanoke City and Alleghany Health Districts (RCAHD). The greater the community level of transmission is, the greater the risk of transmission within school settings if we compromise on the mitigation strategies that we know work.

Vaccination remains the best way to prevent severe illness, hospitalization, and death. All people over the age of five years old are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated, and obtain booster shots once they are eligible to receive them.

Furthermore, RCAHD also strongly encourages all school boards to continue to protect our school staff and our children by employing a multi-layered approach to COVID-19 until our community transmission rates decline significantly from current numbers. This layered approach is currently required for a very good reason: it works.

In addition to vaccination, the multi-layered approach to decrease the risk of transmission of COVID-19 within school settings includes:

- Physical distancing, recognizing that six-foot distancing may not always be practical in all situations.
- Testing of individuals who are sick or who have close contact to someone who has COVID. We recognize that this is a challenge as testing supplies are currently in extremely high demand.
- Contact tracing, isolation and quarantine are additional tools to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

“While all these layers are important in managing the current Omicron surge, I need to stress the importance of maintaining universal indoor masking in our schools. Masking is currently required and should stay in place until our levels of community transmission significantly decrease. Now is not the time to experiment with our teachers’ and our children’s health,” said Cynthia Morrow, RCAHD health director.