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YKHC Supports Full-Time, In-Person School in Fall

BETHEL, AK (May 12, 2021)—The Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) announced it is collaborating with school districts on a plan that supports students safely returning to school full time, in-person this fall, regardless of transmission rates of COVID-19 in the region.

“In-person learning benefits children in so many ways,” said YKHC’s Chief of Staff Dr. Ellen Hodges. “With everyone’s cooperation, kids can safely return to school five days per week this fall and participate in extracurricular activities, including sports.”

Dr. Hodges indicated several factors have been essential to creating a situation where full-time, in-person learning can be safely recommended. These factors include school districts’ successful implementation of testing programs, increasing vaccination rates and decreasing case rates in the YK Delta. With the availability of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for ages 12 to 15 years old, COVID-19 case rates are expected to decline further.

Getting as many eligible people as possible in the region vaccinated against COVID-19 is essential to schools reopening safely. YKHC expects vaccines to be open to all children 12 years and older as soon as Thursday, May 13. Parents and guardians are encouraged to sign up their children to receive the vaccine by visiting <https://tinyurl.com/y7reeyst> or by calling 1-800-478-6599.

Other common strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19 include proper mask wearing, social distancing and regular handwashing. YKHC anticipates having a new school guidance document, which will outline detailed mitigation strategies, available by the end of July.

Communities should expect that COVID-19 may continue to be an issue in the fall. “Discrete outbreaks of the virus may occur in certain schools. Communities should be prepared for that,” Dr. Hodges said. “However, with more people receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and proper mitigation strategies in place, we look forward to having our kids back in school full time next year.”