

Joint Statement from the National Muslim Task Force on COVID-19 (NMTF) and the National Black Muslim COVID Coalition (NBMCC) on School Re-openings and COVID-19 Vaccines
September 1, 2021

Over the next few weeks the 2021-2022 school year will commence across various districts in the United States. As students head back to school with excitement, we recognize that there are heightened concerns about how best to keep students, teachers and staff safe amidst a significant increase in COVID-19 cases across the country. The NMTF and the NBMCC are issuing this statement to share updated guidance on school re-openings and the COVID-19 vaccines.

Here is what we know:

- The [CDC](#) reports that the current wave of cases and hospitalizations are predominantly due to the Delta variant, which is more contagious and is causing more infections
- The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) reports increases in pediatric COVID-19 cases
- While the current COVID-19 vaccines have reduced effectiveness against the Delta variant, they remain highly effective in reducing risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death:
 - Individuals who are fully vaccinated are at lower risk of hospitalization and death compared to individuals who are not fully vaccinated
 - Individuals who are fully vaccinated can be infected with the Delta variant and can spread the virus to others, even when they have no symptoms of illness
 - Even highly effective vaccines experience a reduction in protection over time. The [CDC](#) has announced new recommendations for 8 month booster shots to maximize vaccine-induced protection
- Overall, [vaccination rates](#) remain lowest among young people ages 12- 24 years
- The vast majority of children & young people have a mild course of illness.
- While the need for hospitalization is quite low in children, the frequency of hospitalization is higher in non-Hispanic Black or Hispanic children, and those with comorbidities.
- Prior COVID-19 infection provides substantial protection against infection with the Delta variant. That protection is further enhanced by vaccination.

The Task Force and Coalition strongly recommends:

1. **Health Safety Practices:** All individuals, families, households, and community organizations **continue to follow** public health guidance and rules for physical distancing. This includes:
 - a) **wearing masks indoors if you are in an area of [substantial or high transmission](#) (even if fully vaccinated)**
 - b) **limiting large public gatherings (when physical distancing is not possible)**
 - c) **practice physical distancing - 3 to 6 feet apart**
 - d) **Practice good hand washing techniques and regularly clean surfaces.**
2. **COVID-19 Vaccines:** Getting the COVID-19 [vaccine](#) in consultation with your healthcare provider
3. **Healthy Communities:** The risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19 is lowest in those with good health before infection. The risk begins to increase even for those only slightly overweight. Take steps to improve your overall health. Eat healthy, engage in regular physical activity, find ways to reduce stress and get proper rest. If you have any pre-existing conditions, work with your healthcare provider to optimize control of them.

Pre-K-12 Islamic and Public Schools should:

- Follow the CDC [recommendations](#): “universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.”

- Recommend student-facing teachers and staff and students who are 12 years old and over to consider getting vaccinated
- Provide paid time off for teachers and staff and remove additional financial, social, emotional and access barriers for them to get vaccinated
- Take steps to improve ventilation and air filtration, which can reduce the likelihood of transmission among people while indoors
- Additional recommendations:
 - If possible, have students eat snacks and lunch outdoors
 - Engage in outdoor instruction as much as possible (i.e. morning assembly, prayer, physical education)
 - Provide explicit instruction to staff and students on proper mask wearing, hygiene and enforce these mitigation strategies with gentle but firm reminders
 - Provide students with daily mask breaks outdoors, ensuring physical distancing
 - Provide explicit and clear communication to parents regarding your COVID-19 protocol, including quarantine instructions for those suspecting COVID-19 or close contacts of individuals who are COVID-19 positive. Your local health department will be able to provide quarantine guidelines for students.
 - *Prayer Time:* Students bring their own prayer mats on which they pray; physical distancing of minimum 3 ft; masks on if indoors; if outdoors, masks may be removed but continue physical distancing when possible
 - *Sport, choir and other indoor activities:* Extracurricular activities should be assessed based on several factors, such as nature of activity, ability to maintain physical distancing and masking, indoor vs. outdoor, and air quality/ventilation. Each activity may carry a different level of risk for disease transmission. Schools are encouraged to consult with sports associations for guidance (if available) on school sport and local health departments if unsure about the risks of any extracurricular activities on student and staff health and well-being.
 - *Preventative measures:*
 - Daily disinfecting of all surfaces in contact with students;
 - Appropriate ventilation systems to filter air or opening windows to allow for outdoor air circulation

Higher Education (Colleges and Universities):

Students attending colleges or universities should adhere and follow the guidance of their institutions and local public health departments.

State and local directives:

The NMTF and NBMCC strongly recommend following national guidelines (e.g., CDC) as closely as possible to ensure the safety of students, teachers and staff at Islamic and Public schools. While the CDC provides overarching and broad guidelines for all students, teachers, and staff members, states and local educational jurisdictions will provide additional guidance. These local jurisdictional directives may differ from this statement's recommendations and those found in national guidelines and recommendations. It is suggested that national guidelines be viewed as the minimum standards for safety. Variations thus should err on the side of more caution, not less.

COVID-19 Vaccines:

- All the vaccines approved in the US have been deemed permissible to use ([halal](#)). They have not been compared to each other yet, so we cannot say one is better than the other
- The current available vaccines - Pfizer, Moderna, J&J - vaccines **ARE** effective at fighting severe COVID-19 infections from the delta variant

- Pfizer and Moderna vaccines **DO NOT** contain pork products or alcohol and were **NOT** made using aborted fetal stem cells. They are made using novel mRNA technology. According to health experts, they are not expected to have negative long-term health impacts. This **DOES NOT** change your DNA.
- Fully vaccinated people can have a similar viral load in the nose and throat as those who have not been vaccinated and can spread the Delta variant. The CDC has therefore [recommended](#) that when indoors, **everyone** wear a mask.
- The best way to reduce the negative impact of the variants that cause COVID19 is to stop the spread of these viruses. This means getting the vaccine, wearing masks (indoors and even if fully vaccinated) and physical distancing.
- Even highly effective vaccines experience a reduction in protection over time. The [CDC](#) has announced new recommendations for 8 month booster shots to maximize vaccine-induced protection

The NMTF and the NMBCC stress that although your county/state may not have many COVID-19 cases, the Delta variant is very contagious. A multi-pronged approach to preventing the spread of cases is necessary to combat the emergence of new variants. We must continue to respect federal, state and local public health guidance. We pray that Allah (SWT) protects our communities, rewards those working on the frontlines of this pandemic, and grants us all success over this pandemic.

***Recommendations are based on consultations with public health, medical, and religious experts, guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), federal and state authorities, and are in accordance with the Islamic moral tradition's views on the sanctity and preservation of life.**

Additional Resources (click the link):

[Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

[COVID-19 Guidance for Safe Schools](#)

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

[Back to School Toolkit](#)

[Adolescent COVID-19 Vaccinations Toolkit](#)

[College Students Toolkit](#)

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources

Respectfully,

National Muslim Task Force on COVID-19 (NMTF) and National Black Muslim COVID Coalition (NBMCC)

Signatories:

American Muslim Community Foundation (AMCF)

American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP)

Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America (AMJA)

Association of Muslim Chaplains (AMC)

Council of Islamic Schools in North America (CISNA)

Fiqh Council of North America (FCNA)

Imamia Medics International (IMI)

Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA)

Islamic Networks Group (ING)

Islamic Relief USA (IRUSA)

Islamic Schools League of America (ISLA)

Masjid Muhammad, The Nation's Mosque (MMNM)

Muslim American Society (MAS)

Muslims Caucus of America

North American Imams Federation (NAIF)

Poligon Education Fund

The Initiative on Islam and Medicine (II&M)

The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)

The Mosque Cares, Ministry of Imam Mohammed (TMC)

The North American Islamic Trust (NAIT)

United Mission For Relief and development (UMR)