



December 11, 2020

Dear Canton Local Families,

We understand that the change in Stark County's COVID-19 level to purple has caused concern in our community. It is certainly not easy to make decisions regarding keeping our school district open or transitioning to remote learning. At this time, we remain committed to keeping our schools open.

Please know that we do not take these decisions lightly or make them on our own. I have been meeting almost weekly with the other county superintendents and members from several health departments since the pandemic hit in March of this year. It has, and will remain, our goal to be clear, concise, and collaborative in our choices and messaging. Yes, sometimes that means that our local district messaging sounds the same. Although we make decisions based on what is best for the Canton Local District, taking into account our COVID numbers and family needs, those needs and numbers are similar to many of our neighboring districts. All of our contact tracing has demonstrated that the spread of COVID-19 is not happening in our schools. To date, our classroom and building closures are due to staffing and quarantine issues.

We are fortunate to have guidance from the COVID-19 Response Team in Stark County. Members of the Response Team are listed below and on their website at Coronavirus.StarkCountyOhio.gov. Please take some time to review the talking points attached to this letter to better understand our position to remain open.

Next week, we will be posting an interest survey on the district website. This is an opportunity for families to let us know if they intend to enroll or withdraw their children from the Canton Local Virtual Academy. Note that this interest survey is not the official enrollment/withdrawal form. Following the holiday break, we will post the official virtual academy enrollment and withdrawal form for families who wish to officially request a change in their child's mode of learning for the third nine weeks.

We appreciate your support during this critical time. Continue doing your part by staying home, wearing a mask and staying 6 feet apart from others when in public. Again, we ask that you keep your child home if they are experiencing any symptoms.

We remain flexible in our approach to the COVID situation and we are ready to transition to remote learning if needed. I will communicate any change in direction through our all call system and on the district website.

Please contact your child's principal if you have any other concerns.

Sincerely,

Steve Milano
Superintendent

Stark County COVID-19 Task Force: Alliance City Health Department, Aultman Health Foundation, City of Canton, Cathedral of Life Church, City of Canal Fulton, Canton City Health Department, City of Louisville, City of North Canton, Emergency Management Agency, Stark County Educational Service Center, Massillon City Health Department, Mercy Medical Center, Stark County Commissioners, Stark County Economic Development Board, Stark County Health Department, Stark County Prosecutor, Stark County Sheriff's Office and Stark County Township Association.



COVID-19 Response Team Talking Points for Level 4 - Purple

What does Level 4 - Purple mean for me?

Level 4 - Purple is the highest level of the Ohio Public Health Advisory System. When a county reaches Purple, it means it has met at least six of seven indicators of concern for COVID-19 spread for at least two consecutive weeks. In Stark County's case, we have met all seven indicators. Residents should only leave home for supplies and services. That means necessary travel to get groceries, seek medical attention, pick up prescriptions or those that are going to work.

How did we get here?

This is an aggressive virus that is easily spreads from person to person or from coming into contact with high touch surfaces. It has been asked that everyone do their part to keep this virus from spreading. Unfortunately, gatherings, events, parties, not following precautions, and misinformation towards the virus has caused an increase in community spread. In this situation, it is necessary for all of us to take this more seriously.

Can we still have gatherings of any kind?

It is recommended that all gatherings, public or private, be canceled until further notice to prevent further spread of the virus. The hope is that once the vaccine is available some restrictions will be lifted. We will have to just put things on hold until our community is in a better position.

How can I help slow COVID-19 in Stark County?

You are still able to do things but it is asked that you only go out for supplies and services. Completely limiting your time in public is a must while we battle this virus. Those that are going to work should continue unless otherwise specified by the employer. It is also important to practice simple precautions that have been stressed for most of the pandemic. They are proven to work if everyone listens to public health experts. It is necessary to do the following to help slow the spread:

1. Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water.
2. Wear a mask or facial covering to prevent the spread to others.
3. Keep a social distance of 6 feet between you and others when you have to be in public.
4. Stay home if you are sick, limit your time in public, and do not host or attend gatherings.

The COVID-19 Response Team members include, Alliance City Health Department, Aultman Health Foundation, City of Canton, Cathedral of Life Church, City of Canal Fulton, Canton City Health Department, City of Louisville, City of North Canton, Emergency Management Agency, Educational Service Center, Massillon City Health Department, Mercy Medical Center, Stark County Commissioners, Stark County Economic Development Board, Stark County Health Department, Stark County Prosecutor, Stark County Sheriff's Office, and Stark County Township Association.



COVID-19 Response Team Talking Points for Level 4 - Purple

What does Level 4 - Purple mean for my child in regards to school?

Our schools are low risk places for Stark County's children and each district/school is attempting to keep it that way. Data does show that the school building remains a low risk environment because precautions are being followed and it prevents children from taking part in play dates or hang outs. Those practices should be eliminated during this time.

Will my child's school be closing?

Our schools are having such success because of strict adherence to all suggested protocols: masks are required at all times, social distancing is observed, contact tracing and quarantining is in place, and surfaces are routinely cleaned multiple times every day. If the situation would change, districts will consult with their local health departments and their boards of education. Currently, most districts plan to stay open with daily monitoring of the current situation. If it becomes necessary, schools will close by classroom, building and then district wide. Each district is confident that they would be able to switch to full remote or virtual learning if necessary or if advised by the local public health department. There are some Stark County Catholic schools that have decided to go virtual until the county has been downgraded from Level 4 - Purple.

What has community spread looked like in our schools?

Our districts have been doing their own contact tracing which has shown that almost no spread of COVID-19 has been found in our schools. Spread of the disease among students is happening at social events outside of school.

Will extracurricular activities be canceled?

If extracurriculars need to pause in order to keep students in school, our districts are willing to cancel them. But data from the health departments show this is still not the major cause of spread. Again, the spread of the virus continues to come from social events outside of school control.

What is happening at our hospitals?

Our hospitals are premiere medical institutions that provide quality care for the Stark County community. Through COVID-19, our frontline workers have been heroes by putting in long hours. Currently, our hospitals face an unprecedented challenge as there is a surge in COVID-19 patients while the virus has caused staffing shortages. The hospitals are working together daily to plan the best way forward. Some Stark County hospitals have temporarily suspended or prioritized elective procedures that require an overnight stay based on current capacity and occupancy. These procedures may resume if hospitalizations decrease in the coming weeks and months.

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