



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH

August 23, 2021

Ms. Diane M. Ellis-Marseglia, LCSW, Chair
Mr. Robert J. Harvie Jr., Vice Chair
Mr. Gene DiGirolamo, Commissioner
Bucks County Administration Building
55 East Court Street
Doylestown, PA 18901

Dear Commissioners Marseglia, Harvie, and DiGirolamo.

As you know, the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH), the Department of Education (PDE), and the entire Wolf Administration have made it a priority to support schools and ensure a safe transition to in-person learning this fall. To that end, PADOH and PDE continue to recommend school entities to follow current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, to the greatest extent possible, when creating and implementing mitigation policies and practices for their communities. This is especially important for our younger students who are still not eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine and remain dependent on other mitigation strategies to protect them and their families.

PADOH recently reviewed the Bucks County Health Department (BCHD) [Guidance for Schools](#) published on August 15, 2021. As we begin our third school year impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, I appreciate your leadership and initiative to issue this much needed guidance for our school communities. However, after careful review, I am concerned with several of the responses provided in the BCHD guidance document and hope you can address these before the school year begins in earnest.

Specifically, numerous aspects of the BCHD guidance are inconsistent with the CDC and PADOH recommendations and disregard evidence-based public health best practices. As a local health department, BCHD is responsible for the prevention and control of diseases. A summary of the department's primary concerns includes:

- BCHD does not recommend that persons who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should be tested, which is counter to both CDC and DOH recommendations. The response for a diagnosis of COVID-19 is different from the response for other febrile illnesses, and being able to identify COVID-19 cases is critical for both personal and public health. Per CDC and DOH guidance, the isolation period for individuals with COVID-19 is 10 days; symptomatic and asymptomatic cases may be able to transmit virus during this entire period and should be excluded from school. By not encouraging testing, BCHD's ability to identify cases and respond to outbreaks will be diminished.
- Schools are required to report cases of COVID-19 to DOH. See 35 P.S. §§ 521.4, 521.5, 28 Pa. Code § 27.3. BCHD's official stance in the [Guidance for Schools](#) of "strongly recommending" parents to report cases to the school impedes that effort. Additionally, it is unclear as to how BCHD will