

August 9th, 2021

Greetings students and parents,

As you know, we are seeing a trend upwards in the number of Covid cases in Mississippi. Last week, our church announced that we would return to wearing masks inside the church building and during Sunday services. In light of these realities, we are also making some changes to how we meet in person for Wednesday night youth activities and youth Sunday School. In making these decisions, our goal is that youth continue to meet in person as consistently as possible for as long as possible. We do not want to be subject to either temporary pauses in youth activities or longer periods without activities; as we've seen in the past year, these disruptions can have a detrimental impact on our students' spiritual, emotional, and social health.

Please note the following updated policies for our in-person meetings:

- (1) Youth will follow the directive to wear masks in the church building for as long as or whenever it applies to the congregation at large. Please watch the church announcements for continued information on mask policies.
- (2) Youth will not be required to wear masks outdoors, and we hope that, as the weather cools, we will have more opportunities to spend time outside during Wednesday activities.
- (3) We will temporarily suspend youth dinner/ meal service on Wednesday nights until further notice. Parents, please arrange for your student to eat before or after youth activities. We will have individually-wrapped snacks available for students to eat outdoors.
- (4) If your student is ill (including but not limited to having a fever), please keep them home from any activities. If in the past week your student or family has had contact with someone who is ill or who has tested positive for Covid, we ask that you keep your student home from youth activities.
- (5) If your student tests positive for Covid, please let Will know by phone or by email. Collecting this information will help us make wise decisions about upcoming activities and how to best serve our students. Any information you share about your student's health will remain private and will only be shared with church staff as needed. No private or identifying information will be shared with other parents, students, or members of the congregation.
- (6) When children's activities resume on Wednesday, September 8th, youth activities will follow the schedule of children's activities. Will, Brooke, and David will consult and make decisions about meetings and events together, and decisions which affect children's activities will most likely affect the youth activities schedule.


While we are making changes to our policies on gatherings, we also acknowledge that getting together twice a week counts for a small fraction of students' lives. The larger portion of students' lives - at home, in school, in sports & activities, and around friends & non-family members - has a far greater impact on our youth activities than our policies for youth activities. Parents, your decisions for your students will have an impact on how we are able to proceed with youth activities this Fall. We are asking parents to consider the following as we head into the new school year:

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- (1) The Delta variant of Covid *may* have a higher likelihood of being contracted by young people, including teenagers. This information is developing over time, so please continue to monitor news and announcements from local health agencies.
- (2) Vaccinations help reduce the risk of infection and further spread of Covid. The CDC recommends that all youth over age 12 get a Covid vaccine. Vaccines are available for no charge at local pharmacies (Kroger, Wal Mart, Walgreens, CVS). While the vaccines are not 100% effective at preventing infection, the majority of new Covid cases, especially cases leading to hospitalization, are in individuals who have not been vaccinated. The risks of getting the vaccine are fewer and less severe than the risk of contracting Covid. Please consider having your student vaccinated against Covid. We encourage parents to speak with their student's doctor for information and recommendations regarding vaccination.
- (3) Madison county is currently listed as a high-transmission region for Covid. We will continue to monitor the situation in our county over the coming weeks and make decisions in light of current information and recommendations from community and state health officials.
- (4) The start of a new school year and a new season will produce new situations that *may* lead to an increase in the risk of transmitting Covid between students and peers. Please follow your school's Covid policies and guidelines, as well as those of any non-school activities.

Thank you for your patience in this season! We are taking in new information constantly and updating policies based on relevant news and announcements from our health agencies and from the Mississippi Conference Pandemic Task Force. We will keep you updated as policies change. Please don't hesitate to reach out to Will or Brother David for more information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Will Osborn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Will" being more prominent than the last name "Osborn".

Will Osborn
Director of Youth Ministries