



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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May 6, 2021

Dear Education Leaders:

The existing COVID-19 vaccines are proven to be safe and extremely successful in preventing illness and severe disease. Currently, the Pfizer vaccine is available for adolescents aged 16 and 17 years old. We anticipate FDA authorization to use Pfizer for 12–15 years old in the coming weeks. As a benefit to the state's health and education missions, we strongly encourage all students to get vaccinated as appropriate based on FDA and CDC guidance.

In addition to preventing illnesses and outbreaks, immunization will bring other significant benefits:

- Preventing outbreaks will keep in class instruction in operation;
- Students and staff fully immunized ( $\geq 2$  weeks after final dose in a vaccine series) will not have to quarantine if exposed to COVID-19 (allowing uninterrupted class, sports, and extracurricular attendance); and
- Students and staff fully immunized can forgo any routine viral testing that may be needed to prevent school-based cases and outbreaks.

Thank you all for the phenomenal work you have done protecting and educating our children this year. To have an even more successful 2021-2022 school year, we will need as many students and staff vaccinated as possible.

Sincerely,

Thomas Dobbs, MD, MPH  
State Health Officer