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Mask mandate ends in Atchison County

(KAIR)--Atchison County's mask mandate comes to an end, following action Tuesday of the Atchison County Commission.
Discussion leading up to the decision included input from the Superintendents of Atchison's Public Schools of USD 409 and the Atchison County Community Schools of USD 377.
Dr. Andrew Gaddis, Superintendent for USD 377, told Commissioners that his recommendation, pending approval of the district's Board of Education, is to keep the mask mandate in place at the Atchison County Schools through the end of the school year.

Dr. Renee Scott, Superintendent for USD 409, said masks will continue to be worn in the school district, adding that the county-wide mandate makes the wearing of masks, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, more effective.

The wearing of masks in the Atchison-area schools, following past discussion with school leadership, was a key reason cited by Commissioner Casey Quinn, during the Commission's March 15 regular meeting, for her stance on keeping face masks mandatory while allowing all other virus-based restrictions and mandates to expire, which was the outcome of that session last month.

Kansas City attorney Mike Kuckelman, who owns property in Atchison County, has become a familiar face at recent Commission meetings due, in part, to his criticism of COVID-19 based restrictions. He again addressed the Commission Tuesday, questioning the legality of the Commission's weekly workshop meeting, as it pertains to the Kansas Open Meetings Act, and Commission Chair Jack Bower's wording during the Tuesday morning workshop regarding the County's role regarding local school district health-based decisions.

Once discussion concluded, Bower called for a motion stating that Atchison County would take no further action, at this time, on the mandatory wearing of face masks.

Quinn made the motion, which received a second from Commissioner Eric Noll, with the following unanimous vote voiding extension of the mask-policy, which expired March 31.

On Wednesday, Atchison County Emergency Management Director Wes Lanter, in a release, said that while no Local Health Orders, including a mask mandate, are in place in Atchison County, he said residents "are still encouraged to use caution while in public."

The release included, on behalf of the Atchison County Health Department, CDC and KDHE public health measures that can help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The CDC and the KDHE continue to recommend public health measures in an effort to stop the spread of Covid-19. Public Health measures apply to everyone, including those who have been vaccinated.

- ***Avoid crowds***
- ***Wear a mask in public***
- ***Avoid poorly ventilated areas***
- ***Wash your hands often and avoid touching your face***
- ***Get tested if you are experiencing symptoms***
- ***Get vaccinated!!***

Please continue to do your part in slowing the spread.

Superintendent Gaddis, following the conclusion of Tuesday's meeting, and the decision of the Commission, released the following statement explaining USD 377's face mask policy.

Today, the Atchison County Commission unanimously voted to not extend the countywide mask mandate that expired on March 31, 2021. This action does not immediately affect USD 377 schools. The USD 377 Board of Education adopted a policy at the beginning of the school year requiring the wearing of face masks in all facilities and at all events by students, staff and visitors. Face masks are still REQUIRED to enter all USD 377 Facilities and attend all USD 377 events, until further action is taken by the Board of Education. The USD 377 Board and administration are working to continue to provide a safe learning environment while also transitioning back to “normal”. Please help us in following the existing guidelines so that we can have a successful end of the school year. We would like to thank you in advance for your understanding and support with this. We are hopeful that we can continue to provide a safe learning environment and continued opportunities for our students.
Sincerely,
Andrew Gaddis, Superintendent of Schools