



Board of Supervisors Memorandum

December 21, 2021

COVID-19 Update for the December 21, 2021 Board of Supervisors Meeting

Background

In November 2021, Pima County reported 15,851 cases of COVID-19 compared to 13,933 cases in November 2020. Through the second week of December 2021; 6,120 cases are being reported, and we are likely to end the month at about the same amount as the preceding month. Weekly cases have increased from a low of 243 the last week of May and peaking at 4,234 the third week of November. Last week we reported 310 cases per 100,000 population, well in excess of a low point of 23 per 100,000 persons at the end of May.

Diagnostic COVID-19 testing volume remains very high with 157,012 tests performed in November, and 74,981 tests in the first two weeks of December. The positivity rate continues to be elevated at 11 percent.

We are now experiencing the highest COVID-19 ICU occupancy since last winter. On December 19, hospitals reported 117 COVID-19 positive individuals occupying 39 percent of ICU beds. Overall intensive care capacity continues to be extremely constrained across Pima County hovering at less than 3 percent adult ICU bed availability (or 13 staffed ICU beds) for a second month. As of December 19, COVID-19 patients occupied 33 percent of all ICU beds in Pima County.

COVID-19 cases associated with the delta variant surge appear to be plateauing in Pima County, which would be otherwise welcome news, but that has to be tempered by the very real and still incompletely defined threat posed by the omicron variant now circulating in this community, Arizona, and across the country. Omicron is far more transmissible than previously circulating variants. It is still too early to know whether this particular variant will cause more or less severe disease compared to the delta variant. However, even under the most optimistic scenarios of decreased illness and death, our hospitals may find themselves overwhelmed by what are anticipated to be very large volume of cases.

Emerging data continues to confirm the protective value of vaccination, and boosted vaccination in particular, against hospitalization and death.

Full and boosted vaccination is our way through to the other side of this pandemic.

Schools

Since July 20 of this year, 305 schools have reported 8,022 cases, that have resulted in 237 outbreaks and 131 classroom closures. This includes the week of December 13, 2021 when schools reported 284 cases. Students still represent the overwhelming majority of these cases at 86.4 percent compared to teachers and staff at 13.6 percent. Previously,

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non-vaccine eligible children up to 11 years of age represent 49 percent (3,932 cases) of school reported cases, while the 12 to 19-year age group make up 37 percent (2,960 cases) of school reported cases. (Attachment)

The collaborative efforts of the Pima County Health Department, school districts, and community providers to decrease barriers have resulted in substantial progress in the vaccination and testing in support of school settings. To date these efforts have resulted in the vaccination of more than 97,041 school-age individuals. This will be particularly impactful, since fully vaccinated children with in-school exposures do not require quarantine unless they go on to develop COVID-19.

Vaccination

Vaccination remains the central strategy of the County's pandemic response. Vaccination (and boosted vaccination, in particular) prevents infection and diminishes transmission of the virus, while decreasing hospitalization and death. For this reason, herculean efforts to increase vaccine availability continue across the county in a variety of settings and with a myriad of partners. The net impact of these many efforts is that 1,549,180 doses have been administered and 661,758 (63.2 percent) Pima County residents are now fully vaccinated (with two doses of Moderna/Pfizer or a single dose of Johnson & Johnson).

Booster vaccinations are critical to prevent the most adverse consequences of COVID-19 infection now with the emergence of the delta and subsequently the omicron variants. As of last week, 179,585 Pima County residents have received a booster vaccination.

Breakthrough infections of vaccinated people have become more frequent with the spread of the delta variant and the waning of immunity. In total 9,909 breakthrough infections following complete vaccination have been documented. To put this in perspective, this is only 1.9 percent of the fully vaccinated population. Although these breakthrough cases are occurring, when it occurs infection appears to cause less serious disease among those previously vaccinated. Because of that only 0.06 percent (385) of fully vaccinated individuals have required hospitalization, and only 0.01 percent (97) have died of COVID-19 related illness.

Conclusion

This second winter surge in cases is again severely straining our healthcare resources and requiring continued investment of Pima County resources to bolster vaccination, testing and other mitigation measures. Many in the community are looking to the Board of Supervisors and the County Health Department for help. New state laws and other state actions have limited the tools we have to respond to the requests for action to slow or stop the spread of COVID-19.

However, given the global surge of the exceptionally more transmissible omicron variant, it is appropriate to reconsider the tools that are available to mitigate its impact on Pima County particularly during this winter holiday season. In the December 7, 2021 COVID-19 Update, I informed you that COVID-19 vaccination (including boosters), staying home when sick,

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masking in indoor public settings, maintaining a physical distance of 6 feet or more, and handwashing are the most important evidence-based interventions individuals can undertake to protect themselves, even in the face of the emerging variants. Dr. Garcia, Dr. Cullen and other local and national medical experts have repeated this clear and unambiguous message.

As part of its previous emergency action, the Board of Supervisors took steps to mandate mask use, physical distancing and signage initially in food and pool permitted facilities, but eventually in other business establishments.

The scientific data once again supports a recommendation for universal indoor masking as an impactful low-cost, broadly available, evidence-based intervention that can curb infection and prevent mortality associated with COVID-19. While admittedly there is no practical enforcement option, it has been shown in this community and elsewhere in the country that the mere existence of a mask mandate increases the likelihood of mask use by the public. A County-imposed mask mandate would be a call-to-arms for everyone in this county to step up and do their part to help prevent the spread of a deadly virus, especially during the holidays.

Recommendation

I recommend the Pima County Board of Supervisors approve a resolution to adopt regulations necessary to protect public health requiring Pima County residents to wear face coverings where they cannot maintain a continuous physical distance of at least six feet from other persons.

Sincerely,



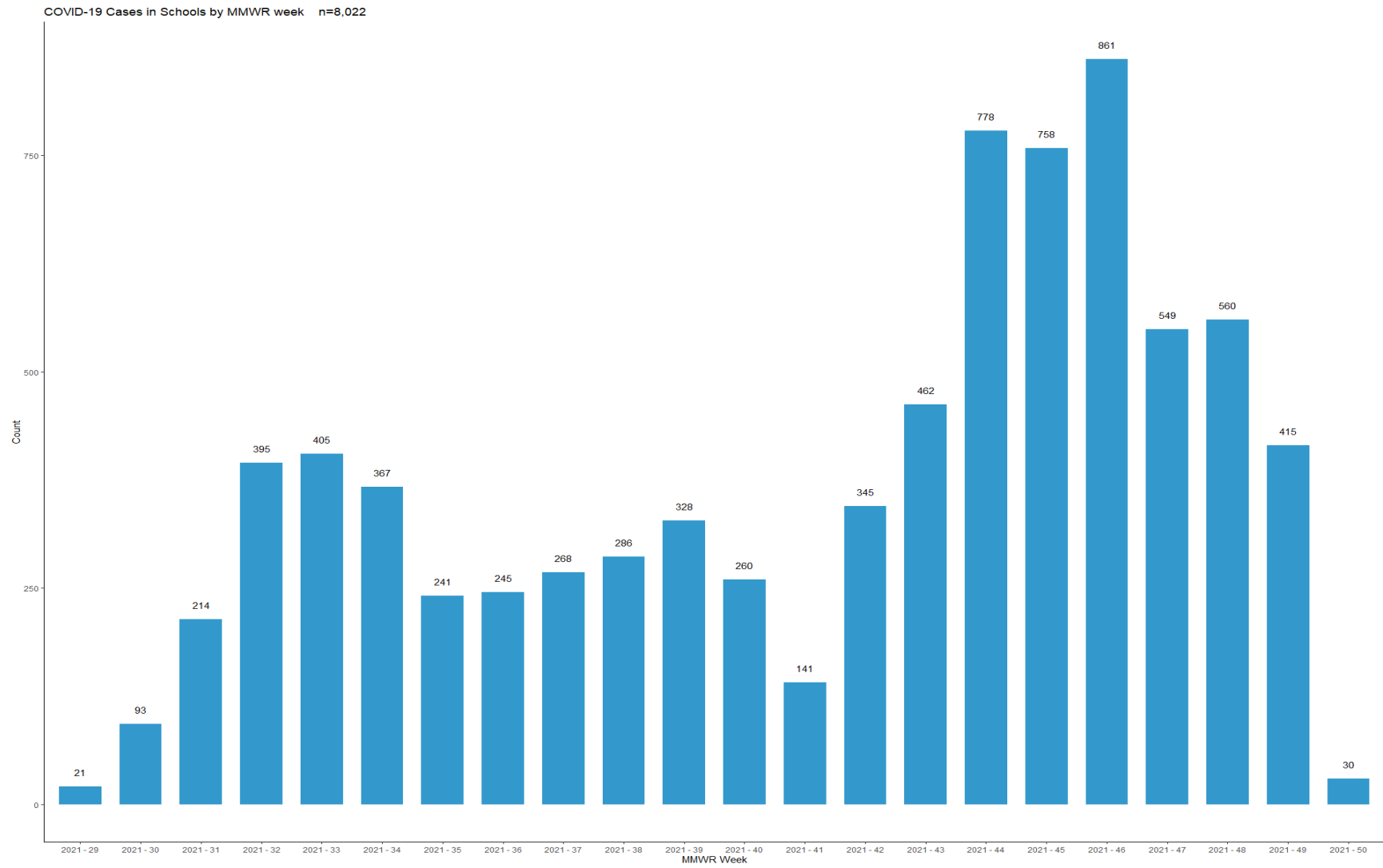
Jan Lesher
Acting County Administrator

JL/dym – December 20, 2021

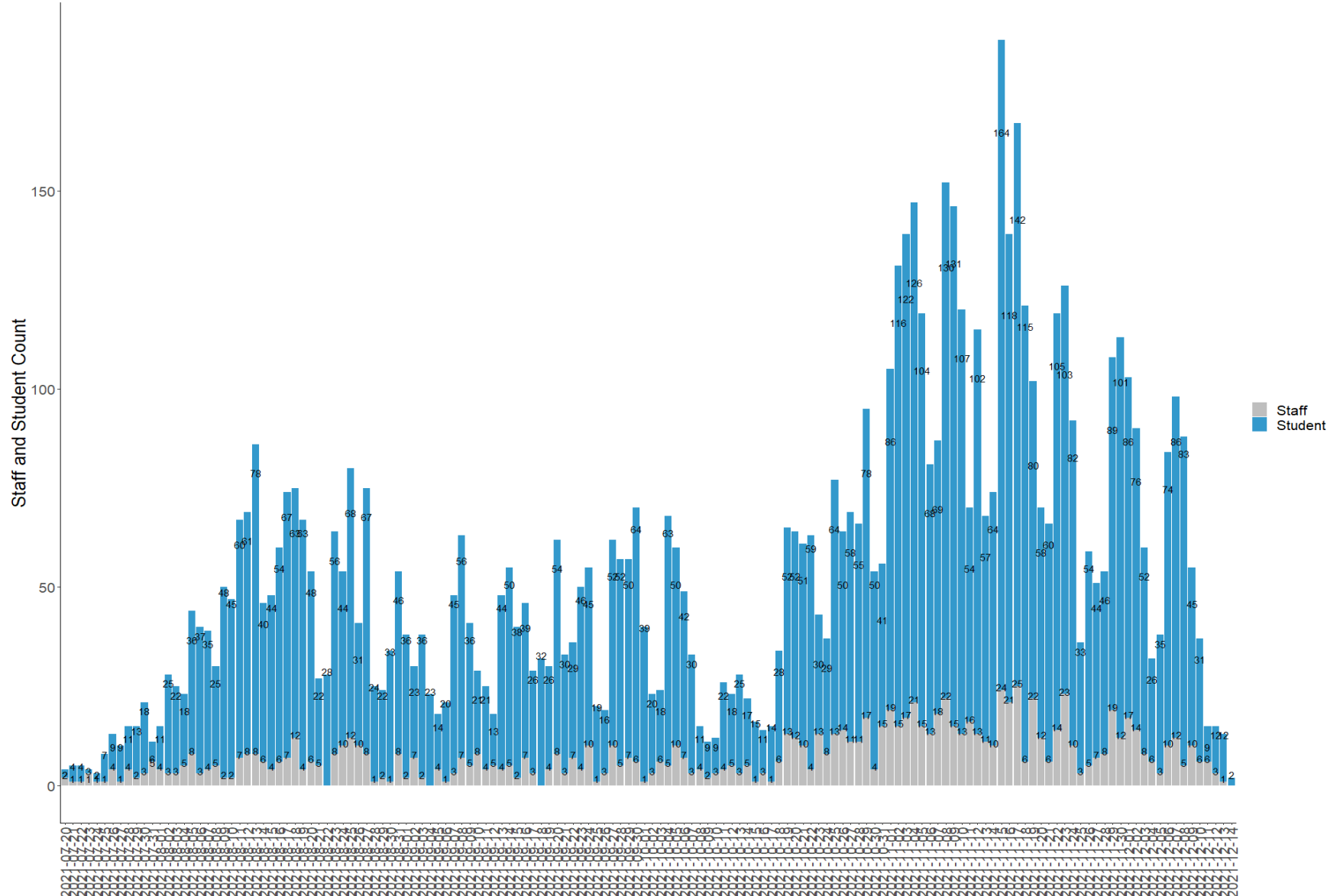
Attachment

c: Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer,
Health and Community Services
Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Terry Cullen, MD, MS, Public Health Director, Health Department

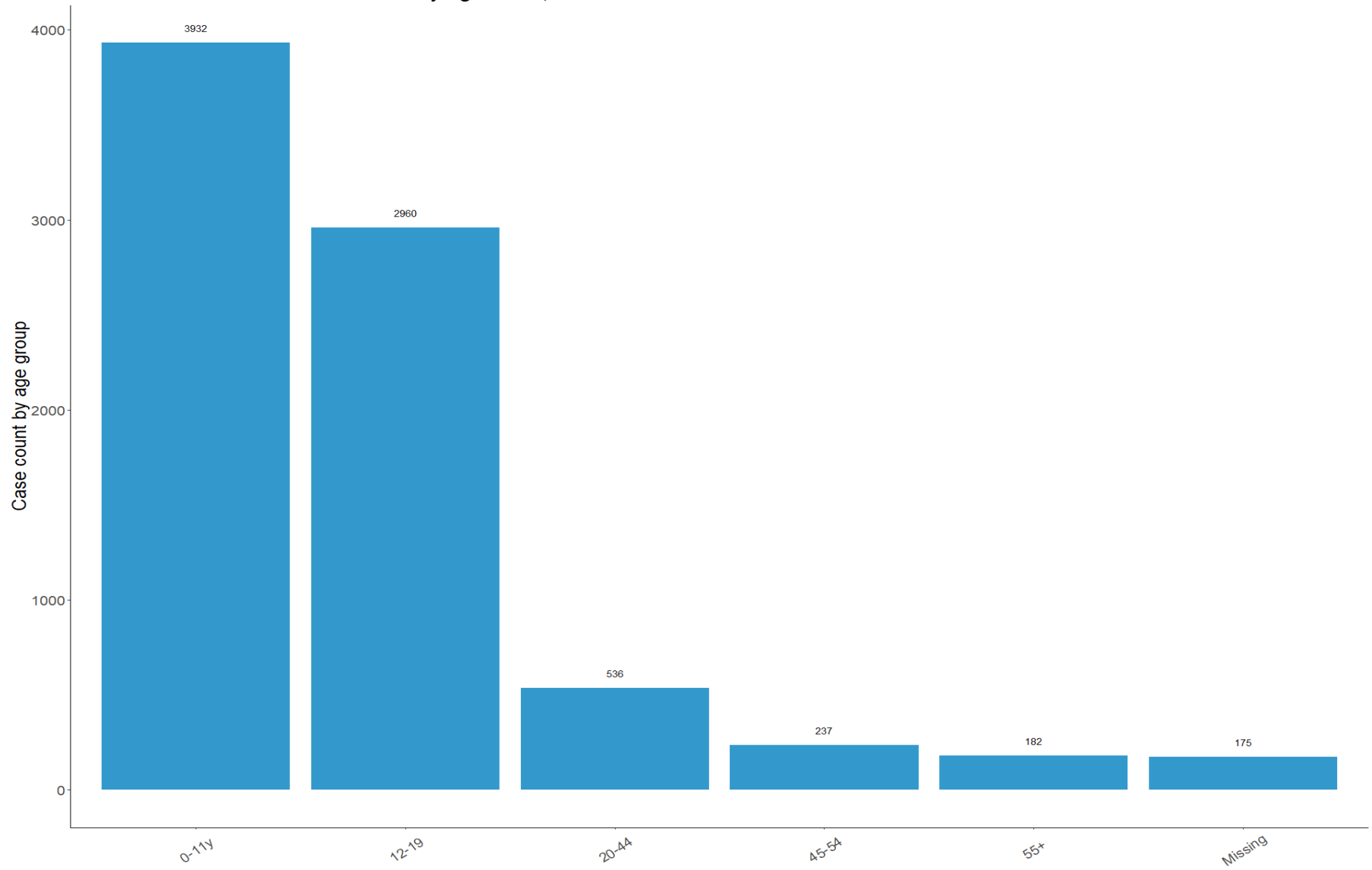
COVID-19 in Pima County Schools



Daily COVID-19 Cases by Staff (n=1,091, 13.6%) and Student (n=6,931, 86.4%) Total n=8,022



Total COVID-19 Cases in Schools by age n=8,022



Total COVID-19 Cases in Pima County School Districts n=8,022

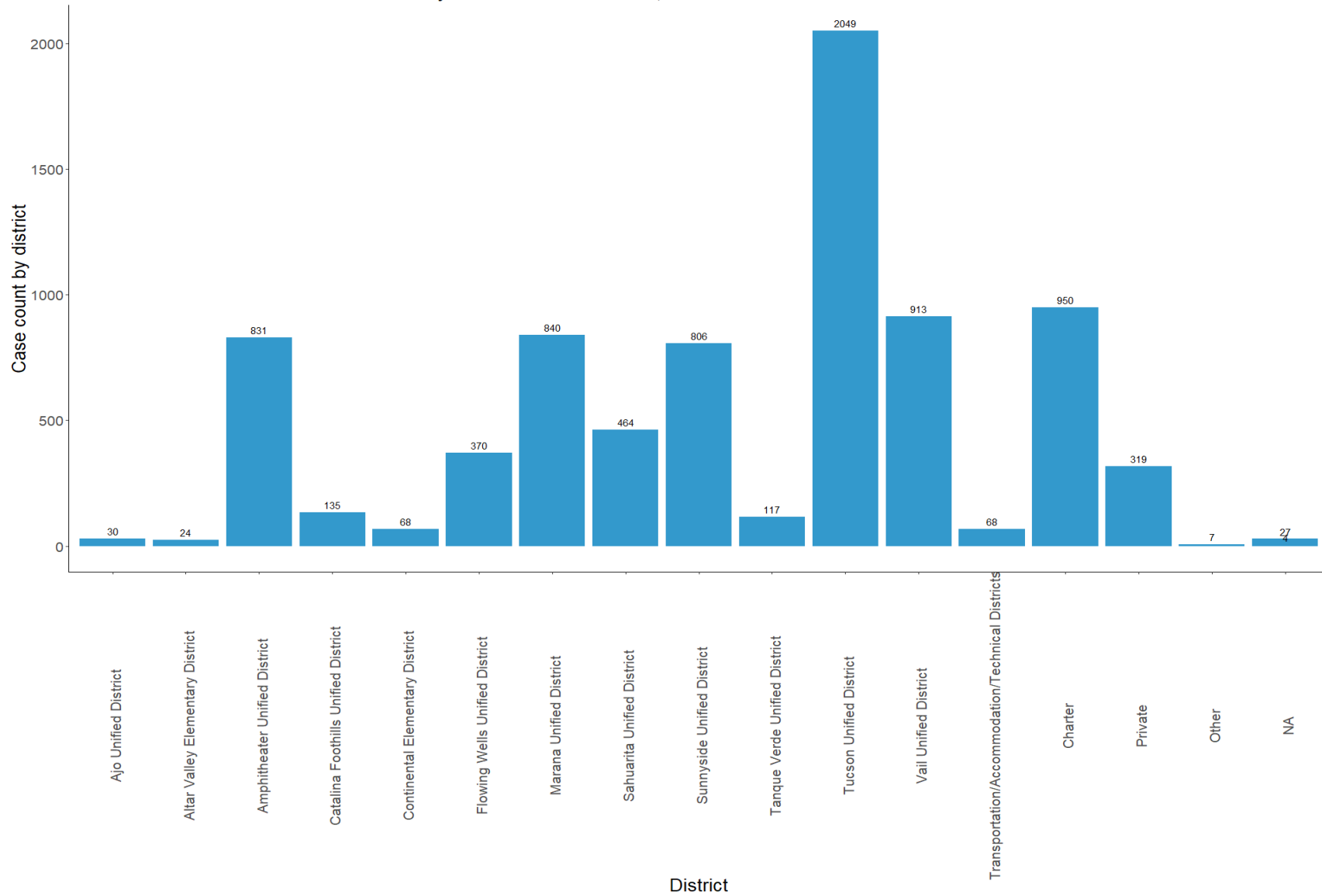


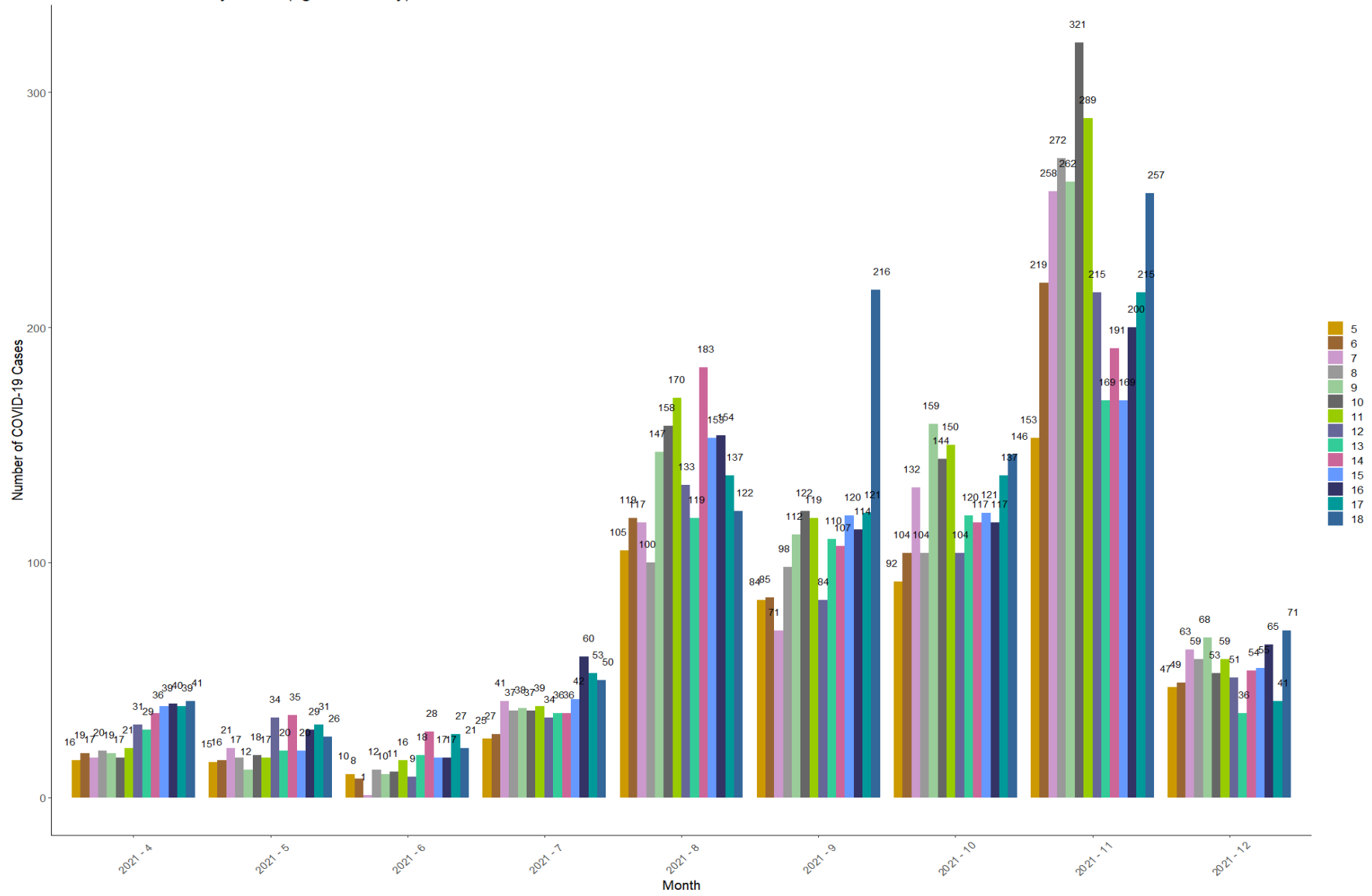
Table 1: School case counts and incidence rates by district enrollment

District	Case count	District enrollment	Case incidence rate
Ajo Unified District	30	452	6.64
Altar Valley Elementary District	24	639	3.76
Amphitheater Unified District	831	13,658	6.08
Catalina Foothills Unified District	135	5,427	2.49
Continental Elementary District	68	598	11.37
Flowing Wells Unified District	370	5,649	6.55
Marana Unified District	840	12,292	6.83
Sahuarita Unified District	464	6,499	7.14
Sunnyside Unified District	806	16,113	5
Tanque Verde Unified District	117	2,103	5.56
Transportation/Accommodation/Technical Districts	68	184	36.96
Tucson Unified District	2,049	45,565	4.5
Charter	950	N/A	N/A
Private	319	N/A	N/A
Other	7	1,076	0.65
Vail Unified District	913	13,392	6.82

Table 2: School outbreak and classroom closures; counts and rates by district enrollment and school count by district

District	District enrollment	School count by district	Outbreak count	Outbreak rate by enrollment	Outbreak rate by school count	Closure count	Classroom closure rate by enrollment	Classroom closure rate by school count
Ajo Unified District	452	1	1	0.2	100.0	0	0	0.00
Altar Valley Elementary District	639	2	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.00
Amphitheater Unified District	13,658	22	19	0.1	86.4	16	0.12	72.73
Catalina Foothills Unified District	5,427	9	1	0	11.1	0	0	0.00
Continental Elementary District	598	1	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.00
Flowing Wells Unified District	5,649	10	1	0	10.0	2	0.04	20.00
Marana Unified District	12,292	19	23	0.2	121.1	17	0.14	89.47
Sahuarita Unified District	6,499	9	17	0.3	188.9	5	0.08	55.56
Sunnyside Unified District	16,113	21	20	0.1	95.2	8	0.05	38.10
Tanque Verde Unified District	2,103	4	11	0.5	275.0	8	0.38	200.00
Transportation/Accommodation/Technical Districts	184	1	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.00
Tucson Unified District	45,565	92	72	0.2	78.3	39	0.09	42.39
Vail Unified District	13,392	20	36	0.3	180.0	21	0.16	105.00
Other	1,076	5	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.00
Charter	N/A	95	27	N/A	28.4	10	N/A	10.53
Private	N/A	62	9	N/A	14.5	5	N/A	8.06

All COVID-19 Cases by Month (ages 5-18 only)



All COVID-19 Cases by Month and Year (ages 5-18 only)

