Mask to Stay/Test to Play Option

Quarantining students at home who have been exposed to COVID-19 in a school environment has the unintended consequence of reducing in-school learning and can be an added strain on parents, schools, and local health departments (LHDs). While vaccination and mask usage are critical components to ensuring a safe school environment, we offer an in-school alternative to quarantining students and school staff at home who have been exposed to COVID-19 in a school environment to support in-school learning and reduce the strain.

This recommendation is informed by a growing body of national experience, a pilot in Warren County, and experience shared by other LHDs that points toward a low number of individuals with direct contact to a COVID-19 positive individual within a school setting who convert to positive cases. Based on this information and the success of the Warren County pilot, we recommend the following for K-12 students and staff exposed to COVID-19 in a school setting.

Please note: Eligibility to participate in mask to stay/test to play is contingent on the exposure being in the school setting or school-related activities. This does not apply to household exposures or exposures outside of the school setting or school-related activities.

Mask to Stay

Direct contacts, regardless of vaccination or masking status, may remain in the classroom environment if they do the following:

- Wear a mask for 14 days after their last date of exposure.
- Self-monitor, or parent-monitor, for symptoms of COVID-19.
- Isolate and get tested if they start to experience symptoms associated with COVID-19 (regardless of level of severity).
- Consistent with guidance for others quarantining in lower-risk environments, students and staff may discontinue these quarantine procedures after seven days — if they don't develop symptoms and test negative between days 5-7.

Direct contacts for COVID-19 are those individuals who are identified as being directly exposed to COVID-19 by the positive case. Remember, COVID-19 is a respiratory virus and does not require physical contact to spread. It is spread through sneezing, coughing, talking, and breathing. These factors should be considered when determining level of exposure and direct contacts. Best practice for distancing is 3 ft with everyone masked, 6 ft if the individual is not masked.

Parents and students are responsible for symptom monitoring; however, if nurses/school staff see a child exhibiting symptoms they should act accordingly.

Test to Play

Asymptomatic contacts may continue to participate in extracurricular activities if they do the following:

- Wear a mask when able. (*This includes: transportation; locker rooms; sitting/standing on the sidelines; and anytime the mask will not interfere with breathing, the activity, or create a safety hazard.)*
- Test on initial notification of exposure to COVID-19.
- Test again on days 5-7. If they are negative at this time, they will test out of quarantine.

Please Note: The tests referenced above are SARS-CoV-2 viral (PCR or antigen) tests. They should be proctored/observed by someone and cannot be an over the counter, at-home test that was self-administered without a proctor.

Districts should consider same day testing for athletic competitions where there is the potential of school-to-school exposure. If students involved in competitions become positive for COVID-19, contact tracing with other team does not need to occur; instead, send a general letter to notify the other team of the potential exposure.

These proposed changes incorporate mask wearing and testing to reduce the chance of spread of COVID-19 within structured school settings and provides a safe alternative to quarantine.