



Healthy people. Healthy places.

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Dear Dane County District Administrators and Superintendents,

Throughout this pandemic, Public Health Madison and Dane County have watched with admiration as the Dane County schools worked tirelessly to keep children and adults who enter our schools safe from the risk of hospitalization, death, and the unknown long-term impacts of preventable COVID-19 infections. Schools have done this by using an array of public health tools, including virtual and hybrid learning models, social distancing, universal masking, testing, and promotion of and access to vaccination for eligible students and adults. Schools have also been strong partners in the implementation of other important tools used to curb the spread of communicable diseases: isolation of positive cases and contact tracing and quarantine of their close contacts. Schools, and especially health office staff, have done a tremendous job to manage and coordinate the details of all these efforts in order to keep children safe and support in-school learning.

COVID-19 is unique to many other diseases in that there is a significant contagious period that occurs for some people who are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic. In this regard, quarantine is a particularly important tool to reduce disease spread in households, workplaces, schools, and elsewhere.

We are aware that some schools are considering changing how they follow quarantine guidance from PHMDC, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, and the US Centers for Disease Control by no longer excluding from school the asymptomatic students who should be quarantined as a close contact of a positive case. Isolation and quarantine continue to remain important communicable disease prevention tools to prevent disease spread. Ensuring that people who are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19, a highly infectious disease, do not attend school while they are potentially infectious is critical for preventing outbreaks that could result in others becoming ill and not being able to attend work or participate in in-school learning.

Quarantine guidance for COVID-19 is based on the length of time that an individual may develop COVID-19 after an exposure, and what exposures, or type of close contact, are most likely to result in infection. Individuals who are close contacts to someone with COVID-19 need to quarantine unless they are vaccinated or have had a positive test for COVID-19 in the last 90 days.

For students in a K-12 classroom setting, close contacts are defined as:

- A student within 3 feet of a student with COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes total in a day, if both students were wearing well-fitting masks.

General COVID-19 quarantine guidance for all other individuals, situations, and non-classroom settings is as follows:

- If an individual was within 6 feet of an individual with COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes total in a day
- Had physical contact with an individual with COVID-19
- Had direct contact with the respiratory secretions of a person with COVID-19 (i.e., from coughing, sneezing, contact with dirty tissue, shared drinking glass, food, or other personal items)
- Lives with or stayed overnight for at least one night in a household with someone with COVID-19

Individuals who are close contacts and are not fully vaccinated and have not had a positive test for COVID-19 in the past 90 days should follow one of these quarantine options:

- Quarantine for 14 days and monitor for symptoms (safest option). Testing 5-7 days after exposure is recommended but not required to end quarantine
- Quarantine for 10 days. Testing 5-7 days after exposure is recommended but not required to end quarantine. Monitor for symptoms until 14 days after exposure
- Quarantine for 7 days and get tested on day 6 or 7. If the test is negative, the individual may end quarantine but should continue to monitor for symptoms until 14 days after exposure

Close contacts who are vaccinated do not need to quarantine but should monitor for symptoms, test 5-7 days after an exposure to confirm that they do not have a breakthrough infection, and wear a mask in public indoor spaces until they have a negative test or for 14 days after the exposure. Close contacts who have had COVID-19 in the last 90 days should monitor for symptoms and wear a mask in public indoor spaces for 14 days after the exposure. Students and staff who had close contact with someone with COVID-19 outside of school should also follow the guidance above.

To be clear, schools cannot redefine “quarantine,” or “close contact” or declare that they are “ending quarantine” for individuals. These are public health terms that have implications beyond the school setting. Schools cannot say to someone who knows that they were exposed to COVID-19 that they do not need to quarantine. They do.

A person who should be quarantining from school and does not or who chooses to continue to meet and socialize publicly does not alter the fundamental risk that they pose to others. A school or any other entity that does not follow public health guidance is putting other people who share spaces with close contacts at risk for infection. It is quite likely that these actions would lead to more infected individuals within school buildings, increase the chance of a severe negative outcome for a student, staff, or other person in the school setting, and potentially jeopardize the ability to continue in-school learning. The infections that spread in schools can get carried home and lead to continued and increased community spread within the school district.

Thank you for your continued work to support the public’s health in your communities. We are proud of the work we have been able to accomplish together in Dane County and believe that continued partnership will present the best way to limit the harm of COVID-19 going forward.



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