



WARREN COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT

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School COVID-19 Contact Tracing and Reporting Updates

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Overall Summary

On January 26th, 2022, Ohio Department of Health Director Bruce Vanderhoff issued a memo to all Ohio Local Health Departments and K-12 School Superintendents titled *Contact Tracing and Case Investigation Statement*. In this memo, Dr. Vanderhoff stated the following are effective immediately:

- The Ohio Department of Health recommends that local health departments (LHDs) shift from universal contact tracing, case investigation and exposure notification to a cluster- or outbreak-based model. This strategy prioritizes people in high-risk settings, such as congregate residential settings (e.g., shelters, correctional facilities, and nursing homes) or for certain circumstances such as outbreaks or clusters in specific settings or in relation to initial cases or clusters associated with new variants, as appropriate.
- Schools may discontinue universal contact tracing but are expected to assist LHDs with contact tracing, case investigation and exposure notification related to outbreaks or clusters in schools as determined by the LHD. K-12 schools should continue to follow ODH's protocol, "Mask to Stay, Test to Play," and allow asymptomatic students to attend school while wearing a mask if they have been exposed to someone with COVID-19. The best place for kids is in school, in-person, full-time.
- ODH also will change the school case reporting cadence to weekly. Schools should report positive student and staff cases to their LHDs by close of business on Fridays. LHDs will continue to report on the same weekly cadence. This schedule will begin on Friday, Feb. 4. ODH will continue to evaluate related school reporting requirements.

Our office identified that there are still likely to be questions regarding these points and how they should be implemented in our local school districts. We also wanted to be sure that our school districts do not continue to gather and provide information to our office that will not be used for public health interventions.

Reporting Cases and Contacts to the Warren County Health District

It is no longer the expectation that information on cases and contacts are reported to the Warren County Health District on a daily basis. School districts should continue to collect all of the information necessary on students that are COVID-19 cases to ensure that they are only returning to school after the appropriate isolation period has been completed.

Please continue to utilize the website case dashboards that each district is already utilizing. WCHD staff collects the data from each of these dashboards on a weekly basis to be able to provide up-to-date data to the Ohio Department of Health on school-related COVID-19 cases.

Contact Tracing in Schools

As per the *Contact Tracing and Case Investigation Statement*, schools may discontinue universal contact tracing for COVID-19 cases. School districts should still make notifications to parents regarding positive cases that they become aware of through any of the ways the school district is notified that a student has COVID-19. This could be accomplished through a COVID-19 dashboard, emails, or other automated mechanism.

Personal Mitigation Measures

Vaccines remain the best public health measure to protect people from COVID-19, slow transmission, and reduce the likelihood of new variants emerging. COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death. WCHD recommends that everyone be up-to-date on their COVID-19 vaccinations and to be sure that they stay up-to-date on any other immunizations.

To protect yourself and others from COVID-19, WCHD continues to recommend that you wear the most protective mask you can that fits well and that you will wear consistently. Masks and respirators can provide different levels of protection depending on the type of mask and how they are used.

The school community should review proper hand hygiene, cough and sneeze etiquette, utilize physical distancing when possible, get tested if demonstrating symptoms of COVID-19, and stay home when sick.

Mask to Stay, Test to Play

The ODH Mask to Stay, Test to Play protocols can continue to be utilized for direct contacts outside of the school environment, such as being a direct contact of a family member with COVID-19. These students can continue to come to school while asymptomatic and masked for 10 days after being a direct contact of a case, instead of having to have the mandatory 5 days of quarantine at home before coming to school masked. Likewise, asymptomatic direct contacts may follow the test to play protocol to participate in extracurricular activities.

COVID-19 Cluster Evaluations

It is still expected that schools assist WCHD with contact tracing, case investigations, and exposure notification for identified COVID-19 clusters or outbreaks. When we are still in a pandemic response, there is not a clear-cut definition of what a COVID-19 cluster may look like in any given situation. The overall goal of identifying clusters of COVID-19 cases is to be able to swiftly implement additional mitigation measures that could slow the spread of illness to others. Some possible examples of what a COVID-19 cluster may look like could be as follows:

- A higher-than-expected number of cases in a specific setting in a school. For example, if there were one school in a district that has had a significant increase in cases over a week period compared to the rest of the buildings in the district seeing a decrease, additional investigation could identify mitigation measures that can be put into place.
- Sports teams that are seeing a large number of cases
- Specific age groups demonstrating significantly more cases compared to other age groups

Overall, if there is a suspicion of a COVID-19 cluster, please call WCHD and we will work together to identify potential mitigation steps as we have historically done for other infectious diseases.