

## CDC/MDH Quarantine Guidelines and Schools

As many of you are aware, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) recently changed their quarantine guidelines. Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) determines the guidelines Minnesota will follow. Ultimately, though the guidelines changed for some- it does not impact everyone. That leads to confusion and increases the risk of spreading COVID 19. The schools in Minnesota have been allowed to determine whether they will follow the less restrictive guidelines put forth, or remain with the current MDH Decision Tree and guidelines. Norman County schools will be allowing students and staff to “test out” of quarantine AFTER the holiday break. This decision is based on multiple factors.

First, the CDC and MDH ultimately agree that the 14-day quarantine is the safest and best practice for slowing the spread of COVID 19. The CDC and MDH also recognize that 14 days is potentially putting families at risk financially, especially for families who have had to quarantine multiple times due to additional exposures. Trying to balance the health and financial safety of families and the communities is the driving force behind the newest recommendations.

Ultimately, the newest guidelines are not for everyone. Only certain exposures allow for a shortened quarantine. Family/household exposures do not fall into that shortened quarantine. In addition, there are multiple factors that play into “testing out” of quarantine. Prior to implementing the newest guidelines, we need to make sure families and the community understand the newest quarantine guidelines- to help ensure that exposure risks do not dramatically increase.

Current guidelines that were being followed prior to the CDC modifications involve a 14-day quarantine from the last day of exposure to a positive COVID individual. The incubation period of COVID 19 is 2-14 days- what that means is that as early as 2 days after exposure all the way to 14 days after exposure- a person can develop symptoms of COVID 19. The most common time frame is 5-7 days after exposure. But there is still a small percentage of individuals who make it to days 12-14 before showing symptoms. That is why it is so important everyone understands the requirements that need to be met to test out of quarantine.

First- only exposures that have a known start and stop time (work, school, community) are allowed to test out. Family/household exposures are not allowed to test out of quarantine. Secondly- you must wait until at least day 5 after exposure (day of exposure is day zero) before you can test. The test must be a PCR test- for schools no rapid tests will be accepted. If the test is negative- on day 8 students/staff may return to school. There will be a form that **MUST** be filled out PRIOR to returning. So, you may test on or after day 5, and if the test is negative- on day 8 you may return to school. **HOWEVER, if you develop even one mild symptom- you must stay home and either re-test or isolate 10 days from symptom onset.**

The other option is to quarantine for 10 days and may return- without testing- on day 11. **Again, if even one mild symptom develops, you must get tested or isolate for 10 days from symptom onset.**

I have been making COVID 19 calls since June. I cannot begin to tell you how many times I heard “I thought it was my allergies,” or “I thought it was a simple cold,” or “all I had was a stuffed-up nose.” Since testing is free, there is no reason not to be SURE that it really is “just a cold,” etc. Yes, other illnesses continue to happen, and not every stuffed-up nose is COVID, not every case of diarrhea is COVID, not every headache is COVID. But during a pandemic, every symptom MIGHT be COVID, and in order to slow the spread- WE MUST BE DILIGENT and AWARE.

The schools want to keep the students IN school. Teachers want to teach IN PERSON. Families want their homes to be homes NOT school. In order for that to happen, we must be hyperaware of any symptom- and get tested or stay home 10 days from symptom onset. I understand the frustration of getting the call that your child has a stuffed-up nose and a cough- you need to come get the whole family. That is not going to change with these new guidelines. I understand that it is not easy getting providers to test your child so they may return to school in a timely manner. Thankfully, we don’t have to rely on providers any longer with the free testing available in various communities. Currently, the only alternative to the MDH Decision Tree is no in-person learning because community spread is rampant.

Attached you will find the guidelines we will follow after the holiday break. If you have any questions about the guidelines, please call me at 218-280-3125.

Sincerely

Tracy Johnson RN

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