**March 11th COVID Update**

Dear Joseph School District patrons,

The purpose of this message is to provide up to date information regarding recent changes in COVID-19 rules made by Governor Brown, the Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Education.

**Isolation** separates people who have a contagious disease from people who are not sick.

* **Individuals who have COVID-19 should isolate for at least 5 days.**
  + To calculate the 5-day isolation period, day 0 is the first day of symptoms or a positive test result. Day 1 is the first full day after the symptoms developed or a positive test result.
  + Isolation may end after 5 full days if the individual is fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and other symptoms have improved.

**Quarantine** separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease and could become infectious themselves to limit further spread of the disease.

**Pausing Quarantine & Contact Tracing**

* **Effective March 12, 2022, Oregon will pause contact tracing and quarantine for the general population, including K-12 settings.**
  + The decision to pause contact tracing and quarantine is based in science and acknowledges that these practices now have very limited if any impact on the transmission of COVID-19 in our communities. The virus that causes COVID-19, has evolved to become one of the most transmissible viruses known. By the time an exposure is identified and contact tracing is performed, transmission has already occurred.
  + Following the Omicron surge, and for the first time during the COVID-19 pandemic, Oregon will have very high levels of vaccine- and infection-induced immunity. The duration of this immunity is unknown, but is believed to provide protection from reinfection for at least 90 days.
  + Our school district will provide notification to families if their child is part of a cohort where a known exposure to COVID-19 has occurred. This will allow individuals and families to take additional precautions according to their individual needs.

**Masking.** Effective March 12, 2022, universal masking in schools and on buses will be a local decision. At a special meeting held March 10, 2022, the Joseph School District board of directors voted to make masking optional in the Joseph School District Buildings (school settings and on buses). In our school settings, we remain committed to:

* Ensuring staff are educated on health and safety protocols;
* Notifying families about COVID-19 cases within the classroom/school
* Providing a safe and respectful environment for all students and staff, including those who choose to continue wearing a mask.
* Following specific health and safety rules in place at school.

**Testing. Because quarantine is not currently required in K-12 settings, regardless of vaccination status or masking, “test to stay” will be referred to as enhanced exposure testing.**

* Students and staff may continue to attend school regardless of their participation in testing.
* Our district will offer testing to individuals at increased risk of severe illness.

**Volunteers.** People who volunteer in the district are still required to meet our district’s health and safety protocols, including the vaccine requirement. If you are a volunteer, please contact the school to get more information on what this may mean for you.

**Future Actions.** Our district will continue to work with our local health providers regarding the status of COVID-19 spread in our community. We are confident in our ability to implement the recent changes and still keep students, staff and community members safe. We acknowledge that our context could change and that we may need to adjust these protocols if our local context does change or if state rules require us to do so.