

# questions

## ANSWERS

AN ADDENDUM TO OCTOBER 23, 2020 COVID COMMUNICATOR

### LAKEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Q** My student is under quarantine, how come my other two kids still have to go to school? Should I only be concerned with sending the other kids to school if they are exhibiting symptoms?

**A** This is an important question. It's the close contact of the person that tested positive and not the contact of the close contact. If we think of circles within circles around a point, the point is the person who tested positive, the close contact is the first circle around the point, and every other circle is sufficiently removed from the point. It's only when someone in the first circle demonstrates symptoms/tests positive that they now become the "point" and the next circle becomes a close contact subject to quarantine.

**Q** How does the timeline work for quarantining?

**A** Per the Health Department, the last day of exposure to someone who has tested positive is day zero. Quarantine lasts 14 days after that, so individuals in quarantine can resume activities if they are symptom free once the 14 days are complete.

**Q** Can a student be quarantined for more than 14 days?

**A** Referring back the last question, quarantine starts from the last day of exposure to someone who has tested positive. If a family member is positive and their student, identified as a close contact, quarantines with that positive family member then that student actually has to quarantine for 14 days past the last contact so that means the positive person is in isolation for 10 days and the close contact student is in quarantine 14 days beyond that for a potential 24 days out. The result is families with a positive family member are seeking alternative locations for either the positive individual to isolate or the close contact family members to quarantine if possible.

**Q** Does the health department make the call on closure or does the school district?

**A** By "closure", one could mean a couple of different things. First, a school or entire district can be ordered closed by the health department based on an outbreak specific to that school or area it serves. A second type of closure is smaller in nature in which an individual tests positive and based on how many people are identified as close contacts, a portion of school is "closed" via quarantine. In this instance, direction is still coming from the health department. Ideally, the health department notifies us of a positive case and requires us to provide the names and contact information for those that fit the definition of close contacts. They then notify these individuals that they are required to quarantine. Unfortunately, local health departments are fairly overwhelmed so, while doing the best they can, they aren't always able to be as timely as we can. Take our example from this week. The individual felt symptoms on Wednesday, went for a test the next day, did not return to school Thursday or Friday, and received the results Saturday night. S/he did the responsible thing and notified school authorities immediately. We were then able to work Sunday to do the contact tracing, personally call the affected students' parents, and get a general notice out to all other staff, students, parents, and the community. Because we made the initial contact with those to be quarantined, it could appear that the District made the decision to "close" but, in fact, we followed health department guidelines.

**Q** We're going into winter and cold and flu season, what if a person who has COVID-19 symptoms refuses to be tested?

**A** Per the direction of the health department, individuals with COVID symptoms who refuse to get tested must be excluded from school/work for 10 days unless they have a doctor's note indicating the symptoms are not COVID related and are symptom free for 24 hours.

**Q** If a bus driver or teaching staff is found to be positive, does that mean we will always be shutting down entire grade levels of schools?

**A** Bus drivers and teachers are different - on a bus, the driver isn't interacting with all the students, and it would be reasonable to only quarantine those students sitting within six feet of the driver. Teachers, depending on level, are different as well because an elementary teacher would only be coming into contact with their self-contained classroom, whereas the secondary teacher has rotating groups of students for 55-110 minutes.

**Q** Why not make the teacher stay six feet away from students at all times?

**A** This is both impractical and instructionally detrimental. Consider that the standard for being a close contact is being within six feet of someone for a cumulative fifteen minutes. At the elementary schools, teachers and students are "self-contained" other than lunch, recess, and a special class for a seven-hour school day. Though secondary teachers and students are together for less time, 55-110 minutes per day, requiring this type of distancing would eliminate the small group and one to one instructional support students receive when they don't understand a concept.

**Q** If we are all wearing a mask or face covering, why is there still quarantine? The mask was supposed to prevent a significant amount of transmission?

**A** Facial coverings do prevent a significant amount of transmission, but not all transmission. Speaking with other school districts in our Ionia County Intermediate School District, we are unaware of the transmission of the virus occurring in school. To date, positive cases have been traced back to activities outside of school buildings. The consistent wearing of facial coverings in schools is a contributing factor to reducing the spread of the virus in our community.

**Q** Does the school realize it is difficult for us to keep our jobs when we have students quarantining?

**A** It is, and will remain, the position of the District to always work in ways to keep as many students in school for in-person instruction as possible. But we have to understand just how bad it is now. On Monday, October 19th, the Ionia County Health Department reported 200 positive cases and more than 1000 contacts/quarantines since the start of the month. Those are the largest figures since data collection began last March. Health officials report the increases are mainly due to the fatigue with and subsequent lack of safe practices, mainly wearing masks and social distancing. Schools are critically important for academic, social, emotional, and economic wellbeing of our students, their families, and our community. Please be steadfast in your wearing of a mask, regularly washing your hands, and adhering to social distancing recommendations if you attend a social or community gathering.