

Dear Knox County School Families,

Thank you for your many phone calls and emails regarding COVID-19. Many of your questions have dealt with the differences between isolation and quarantine and the need for masking. We are writing to you today to clarify these concerns.

- **Isolation** is specifically for those who are **infected** with the COVID-19. Those in isolation are referred to as **confirmed cases**.
- **Quarantine** is for those who have been **exposed** to someone who is **infected** with COVID-19. Those in quarantine are referred to as **close contacts**.

An individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 will be ordered into isolation for 10 days from the onset of symptoms or if they're asymptomatic (symptom free), 10 days from their test date. It is very important that a confirmed case stay home and isolate from others in their household during their infectious period. If you do not isolate, you could pass COVID-19 to your family members, friends and co-workers. Testing out of the 10-day isolation period is not an option. The legal authority for a local health department to issue an order of isolation is outlined in the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3707.11. To be isolated there needs to be a medical diagnosis, and a positive test result meets that criteria.

A close contact is defined as any individual who is not vaccinated, does not wear a mask and has been within six-feet for 15 minutes or longer over a 24-hour period of an individual who is a confirmed case. All close contacts will be ordered, not recommended, into quarantine for up to 14 days.

If a person who is quarantined remains asymptomatic (symptom free) for 10 days, they can be released from quarantine on day 11. After five days in quarantine, an asymptomatic individual can take a COVID-19 test and if they test negative and remain asymptomatic through day seven, they can be released from quarantine on day 8.

The legal authority for a local health department to issue quarantine orders is clearly defined in the ORC 3707.08. In addition, ORC 3707.16 states that quarantine persons are not permitted to attend public gatherings, with a specific mention of schools.

Ordering someone into isolation or quarantine is not done randomly. It is based on the results of a positive test. It is not done for punishment. It is not done to keep students from attending school or participating in athletic events. It is done to protect others from getting sick.

In the beginning of the pandemic our children were fortunate to not be impacted with severe illness due to COVID-19. Unfortunately, this virus has changed course and we are seeing more and more



youth getting sick. Children's Hospitals throughout Ohio report their inpatient numbers for children with COVID-19 are the highest they have ever been. More children than ever are entering their emergency departments and urgent care centers. This impacts the care of all children, not just those that are COVID-19 positive. Seven Knox County children have been among those hospitalized.

Knox Public Health is committed to providing a safe environment for students in our schools. Beyond asking confirmed cases and close contacts to stay home and out of school when in isolation or quarantine, Knox Public Health continues to support the use masks for prevention of COVID-19. Additionally, having at least three-feet of distancing between students while in the classroom helps to lower the transmission of COVID-19.

We have found that the transmission of COVID-19 in the classroom is reduced drastically when everyone – teachers, students and other school personnel – wear a mask. Last year, when wearing a mask was more consistent in the schools, there were very few students infected and classroom instruction was able to continue. Since school started in August, we have seen a big increase in COVID-19 cases involving those under the age of 18. Schools have been challenged to maintain classroom instruction versus moving to remote learning. Presently, children attending school who are under the age of 12, are not yet eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Of the students, ages 12-18 in Knox County who are eligible for vaccine, less than 30% are vaccinated. Wearing a mask protects those who are not vaccinated, especially those who are too young to be vaccinated.

We understand that wearing a mask is not easy. We understand how wearing a mask can feel like an infringement on your rights and freedoms. We are not mandating the wearing of masks, nor is the state of Ohio. **Wearing a mask is a choice we highly recommend you make to protect everyone – you, your family, friends and co-workers.**

By law, it is our responsibility as your public health department to provide guidance to residents and to put into place procedures to control the spread of communicable disease. Actions taken to control the spread of COVID-19 such as isolation and quarantine, vaccination, wearing masks and social distancing have proved successful for over 200 years for similar disease outbreaks. With your help, we think it can work for COVID-19.

Knox Public Health is committed to continuing to work with our local school leaders to provide the safest environment possible for students and staff, and safeguarding the threat of returning to remote learning due to the spread of COVID-19. The importance of in-person learning, five-days a week has been and will continue to be a primary goal. With that noted, health and safety measures to reduce COVID-19 need to be followed by everyone in the Knox County community. We look forward to continuing to work with you to keep our students safe, and in school.

Sincerely,



Julie Miller, RN, MSN
Health Commissioner



Zach Green, MBA
Deputy Health Commissioner