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October 25, 2021

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Ohio Department of Health Releases Updated School Quarantine Guidance

“Mask to Stay” and “Test to Play” Options Announced

COLUMBUS – Bruce Vanderhoff, MD, MBA, director of the Ohio Department of Health, today announced additional quarantine options, “Mask to Stay” and “Mask to Play,” for school districts and local health departments across the state. Out-of-school quarantining has the unintended consequence of reducing in-school learning and can place an added strain on parents, schools, and local health departments.

“While vaccination and masking remain critical components of ensuring a safe school environment, to support in-school learning, we offer an in-school alternative to out-of-school quarantining for students and school staff exposed to COVID-19 in school settings and during school-related activities,” explained Dr. Vanderhoff. “Those exposed outside of school-related activities, such as in the household, should continue to follow standard quarantine guidelines.”

The proposed changes incorporate mask-wearing and testing to reduce the chance of spread of COVID-19 within structured school settings and provide a safe alternative to out-of-school quarantine. The options below only apply to direct contacts in a school environment – those individuals who are identified as being directly exposed to COVID-19 by a positive case in a classroom or other school setting. COVID-19 is spread through sneezing, coughing, talking, and breathing. The best practices for distancing are 3 feet with everyone masked, 6 feet if not masked. Tests can be either PCR or antigen tests, but they must be proctored or observed. The full guidance is available at <https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/schools/k-12-schools-quarantine-alternative.pdf>.

“The ‘Mask to Stay’ and ‘Test to Play’ options are informed by a growing body of national experience, as well as from a pilot in Warren County, and experience shared by other local health departments pointing toward a low number of direct contacts that convert to cases within school settings,” Dr. Vanderhoff stated.

Mask To Stay

Direct contacts in a school environment, regardless of vaccination or masking status, may remain in the classroom environment if they:

1. Wear a mask for 14 days after their last date of exposure.
2. Self-monitor, or parent-monitor, for [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
3. Isolate and get tested if they start to experience symptoms associated with COVID-19 (regardless of level of severity).
4. Consistent with guidance for others quarantining in lower-risk environments, students and staff may discontinue these quarantine procedures after seven days — if they meet two basic criteria: one – they don’t develop symptoms, and two – they test negative between days 5-7.

While parents and students are responsible for symptom monitoring, if school staff or school nurses see a child exhibiting symptoms they should act [accordingly](#).

Test to Play

Asymptomatic contacts in a school environment may continue to participate in extracurricular activities if they:

1. Wear a mask when able. This includes wearing a mask during transportation, such as traveling on a team bus to and from games; while in locker rooms; while sitting or standing on the sidelines; and any time the mask will not interfere with breathing, the activity in which they are participating, or create a safety hazard.
2. Test on initial notification of exposure to COVID-19.
3. Test again between days 5-7 following exposure to COVID-19. If they are negative at this time, they will test out of quarantine after day 7 and can resume normal activities.

School districts are also encouraged to consider same-day testing for athletic competitions where there is the potential of school-to-school exposure.

Those who are fully vaccinated, as well as those who consistently wear masks in school, can already remain in the classroom if exposed to COVID-19 in a school setting.

There are many opportunities in Ohio to be vaccinated, including walk-in and scheduled appointments statewide at pharmacies, federally qualified health centers, doctor's offices, community vaccination sites, and local health departments. There is ample supply of vaccine for boosters, as well as first and second doses, for Ohioans. Ohioans can check their eligibility and book an appointment online at gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov or by calling 1-833-427-5634.

Ohioans who want to learn more about the safety, efficacy, and side effects of COVID-19 vaccines should talk to their doctor, nurse, or pharmacist, or visit coronavirus.ohio.gov/vaccine to learn more.

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Today's press conference announcing "Mask to Stay" and "Test to Play" can be viewed online at <https://youtu.be/bBDhjLtuDJg>.

About the Ohio Department of Health

The Ohio Department of Health's mission is advancing the health and well-being of all Ohioans by transforming the state's public health system through unique partnerships and funding streams; addressing the community conditions and inequities that lead to disparities in health outcomes; and implementing data-driven, evidence-based solutions.