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PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

March 9, 2022

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Dear Superintendents and Heads of Schools,

Yesterday, March 8, I received updated [Requirements and Guidance to Mitigate COVID-19 Transmission in K-12 Schools, Child Care, Early Learning, Youth Development, and Day Camp Programs](#) from the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), which takes effect on March 12.

I am in alignment with the updated guidance and do not plan on deviating from the DOH's recommendations. Here are the main highlights of changes to guidance from previous versions:

- Masks are no longer required for students and staff, except in specific situations. This includes:
 - Healthcare settings (such as nurse/health room or isolation space for symptomatic individuals)
 - As part of management of an outbreak or cluster of cases within a classroom or other school setting, etc.
 - Masking is strongly encouraged for 10 days post exposure for individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19.
 - Individuals, children, and staff who chose to continue masking should be supported and have their choices respected.
- Test to Stay has been modified to a ten-day testing protocol to be utilized in specific high-risk situations including:
 - Cluster of cases or outbreak
 - High-risk exposure, such as ongoing household exposure where there is an elevated risk of transmission
- Emphasis on identifying symptomatic individuals and ensuring that they isolate and have access to COVID-19 testing

There are still a few items within the updated guidance that are undergoing clarification and review in order to support our schools, childcare and learning centers, and youth programs as they operationalize the new guidance. These include:

- Masking recommendations or requirements for:
 - High-risk individuals
 - People who work with students with disabilities
- Implementation guidance for notification for high-risk individuals in the event they are identified as a close contact to a positive COVID-19 case.
- The updated DOH Symptom decision tree which our Thurston County COVID-19 flowchart is based upon.

This new guidance is intended to support schools, childcare and learning centers in layering COVID-19 prevention measures in order to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 while keeping kids learning in person as much as possible. We will continue to work closely with you and your teams over the days and weeks as you operationalize this new guidance. I am grateful for your flexibility and continued efforts to keep our community safe.

Sincerely,

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Health Officer, Thurston County