

January 17, 2022

Re: The identification of close contacts in K-12 settings

Dear Superintendent,

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Kansas State Department of Education see and understand the immense pressure you are facing to deliver quality education in light of the current Omicron surge. We are hoping to temporarily relieve one pressure point, specifically the identification of susceptible close contacts who were exposed to COVID-19 in K-12 school settings. For school districts struggling to identify and notify close contacts during this Omicron surge, we propose a temporary suspension of this practice. For school districts that are able to maintain their current process for identification of close contacts, we encourage you to continue doing so as this is an important tool to help control school-based transmission of COVID-19.

What this means:

- For a 30-day period starting Tuesday 1/18/2022, school districts **may temporarily suspend** identifying specific susceptible close contacts potentially exposed to COVID-19 in classroom and extracurricular settings. KDHE and KSDE will reevaluate this recommendation after 30 days.

Expectation for K-12 school districts:

- Communicate that it is the responsibility of families to monitor their children for signs of COVID-19 disease and to keep them home when sick.
- School districts may consider posting a list of classrooms and extracurriculars and the date(s) of exposure or push notification to parents. The notification should be done in manner that does not identify the person who attended while infectious.
  - Alternatively, schools may consider messaging to parents about the possibility of widespread transmission for those in public spaces.
- Messaging should clearly state that anyone in that classroom/extracurricular activity is potentially exposed but that specific close contacts will not be identified or notified.
- Messaging can include education on what it means to be susceptible or not immune to COVID-19 disease.
  - Persons who received two doses of a mRNA COVID-19 vaccine (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna) over 5 months ago but have not received a recommended booster shot when eligible. To allow time for students to catch up with the latest recommendations and to minimize disruption to in-person learning, schools may consider forgoing quarantine for students ages 12-17 years who completed their primary vaccine series but have not yet received all eligible boosters.
  - Persons who received the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine (completing the primary series) over 2 months ago and have not received a recommended booster shot when eligible.
  - Those who are not vaccinated or have not completed a primary vaccine series AND do not have evidence of recent infection in the last 90 days.
- Messaging should remind parents to watch for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 disease for 10 days after exposure, especially in those who are not considered immune.

- School districts should consider requiring that everyone, regardless of vaccination status and regardless of exposure, wear a well-fitting mask daily indoors and outdoors around others.
  - Alternatively, school districts should require anyone potentially exposed to wear a well-fitting mask around others, indoors and outdoors, for 10 days after exposure.
- School districts should revisit and revise plans for implementing multiple layers of prevention that will help prevent transmission of disease within schools. These strategies include physical separation, hygiene and disinfection, vaccination messaging, testing, and masking.

Expectation for all parents:

- Regularly monitor your children for symptoms of COVID-19 disease.
- If your child is symptomatic, have your child tested with a diagnostic test if available.
- Do not send your child to school if they are sick or if they test positive.
  - Everyone who tests positive for COVID-19 disease should stay home for at least 5 days and be fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication before leaving home (minimum 5-day **home isolation**). After that, they may resume normal activities but should wear a well-fitting mask around others, indoors and outdoors, for an additional 5 days.
- Notify your school if your child tests positive.

Expectation for parents of potentially exposed children:

- Consider keeping your child home for 5 days after the exposure (minimum 5-day **home quarantine**). After that, they may resume normal activities but should wear a well-fitting mask around others, indoors and outdoors, for an additional 5 days.
  - If a child cannot or will not wear a mask, consider keeping your child home for 10 days after the exposure.
- Have your child wear a well-fitting mask while around others, indoors and outdoors, for 10 full days after the exposure.
- Monitor your child for symptoms of COVID-19 disease for 10 days after the exposure. Have your child tested 5 days after exposure or immediately if they become symptomatic.
- If your child is exposed to COVID-19 disease outside of school, please notify the school.

Expectation for Test to Stay School Districts:

- During a temporary suspension of close contact identification in K-12 settings, consider:
  - Switch to diagnostic testing to support students/teachers/staff who become symptomatic during the school day and/or for students/teachers/staff that call and notify the school that they are symptomatic.
  - Focus on antigen testing for people coming back from 5 days of **home isolation** after testing positive. This can be a one-time test on the morning of return to school with the option to test again the following morning.
  - Focus on antigen or PCR testing for people coming back from 5 days of **home quarantine**. This can be a one-time test on the morning of return to school with the option to test more often.

Again, we thank you for everything you are doing to provide for your community during these unprecedented times. Please continue to communicate with us as we all try to navigate the current situation.



Janet Stanek  
Secretary  
Kansas Department of Health and Environment



Dr. Randy Watson  
Commissioner of Education  
Kansas State Department of Education