

November 13, 2020

Mount Vernon Community School District Families and Staff Members:

Linn County Public Health has come out with new guidelines regarding the definition of close contacts and the subsequent use of quarantine to address COVID-19 situations. These new guidelines went into effect yesterday, and are consistent with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Close contact is now defined as any of the following, regardless of mask use:

- Being within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of **15 minutes or more in a 24 hour period**, starting from 2 days before illness onset or testing
- Living in the same household as a person diagnosed with COVID-19
- Direct physical contact with the person (hugging, kissing, etc.)
- Being sneezed on, coughed on, or somehow coming into contact with respiratory droplets from a COVID-19 infected individual.

Close contact includes all of the above, regardless of mask use.

These new guidelines expand the number of students or staff that may need to quarantine when deemed to be close contacts. Linn County Public Health has issued the new guidelines as a response to greater community spread of the virus throughout the county, and due to the current stress being placed upon the healthcare systems in Linn County at this time. Close contacts will be expected to quarantine for 14 days after the last exposure. Quarantine is used to keep someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others. Quarantine helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are sick, or if they are infected with the virus without feeling symptoms. People in quarantine should stay home, separate themselves from others, monitor their health, and follow directions from their local health department.

If a close contact develops symptoms of COVID-19, or tests positive for COVID-19, he/she should isolate. Isolation is used to separate someone who is infected with the virus away from others, even in their home. People who are in isolation should stay home until it is safe for them to be around others. In the home, anyone sick or infected should separate themselves from others by staying in a specific “sick room” or area and using a separate bathroom (if available) until the following criteria is met:

No fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of medicine that reduces fevers)

AND

other symptoms have improved (for example, when cough or shortness of breath have improved)

AND

at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared

Additionally, this week the CDC came out with research that emphasized the importance of mask wearing. In the latest research the CDC has determined that mask wearing not only keeps the mask wearer from spreading the virus to others, but it also protects the mask wearer from more easily contracting the virus. That is why we continue to encourage mask wearing in all areas outside the home, especially when in contact with other people.

Now more than ever, if you believe that your child has possibly been exposed to COVID-19, or has tested positive for the virus, please contact the appropriate school nurse right away so that we may complete contact tracing and provide advice to you on how to address the situation at home. Also, remember that you will be contacted by the schools if your child has been deemed a close contact for any reason. If you have not been contacted, your child has not been identified as a close contact.

This is a difficult stretch of time in the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is important we all do our part in engaging in safe practices. We remain committed to keeping our schools open, and again appreciate all you are doing to make this a reality. We are discussing on a daily basis whether we feel we can remain in the current hybrid model of learning, or whether we feel it would be prudent to move to remote learning for a period of time. The last several days have been more calm with regard to COVID-19, after a busy time late last week and early this week. We will update our numbers next week, and will be pleased to welcome back to school many of the students who have been quarantined over the past few weeks.

Have a great weekend. Stay safe!

Dr. B.