Newton County Health Department

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September 15, 2020
Newton County School Administrators

Dear School Administrator,

Last night, the Newton County Board of Health gave authorization for me to make changes that allow more flexibility in how we deal with contacts to a positive COVID-19 case in our Newton County schools. This will demand a high level of cooperation between parents, school districts, and the Newton County Health Department. Currently, a contact to a positive COVID-19 case is sent home for a 14-day quarantine and is unable to return to school until the quarantine time has been completed. I believe this can lead to many lost learning opportunities along with at-risk children not having their nutritional needs met and perhaps being in an abusive situation at home. Mental anguish continues to be a big issue during this time of pandemic, and I believe children have better health outcomes given the opportunity to attend school and participate in school activities. Therefore, at your discretion and upon your time frame, I, as the local Public Health Authority, allow contacts to a positive COVID-19 case to continue to attend school and school activities with the following conditions:

1. All contacts must always wear a mask/face covering except during a time that proper social distancing can be observed, specifically the ability to have at least 6ft between the contact and others. This includes during sporting or other extracurricular activities. For activities where masks are not feasible, contact must have a negative test for COVID-19 within 36hrs of activity start time before being allowed to participate in the activity.

2. School personnel and parents must monitor the contact for any symptoms of COVID-19 and must isolate the contact from others immediately upon any symptom development.

3. Contact must adhere to the conditions of quarantine in that he/she may attend school and school activities but must remain in quarantine at home at all other times until the 14-day quarantine has been completed.

4. School personnel must continue to identify and report those individuals who become COVID-19 positive and those who are identified as contacts of those individuals to the Newton County Health Department.

5. School personnel along with the Newton County Health Department will monitor closely those positive cases and the contacts and will immediately move to a more strict policy.
if the data shows a substantial increase in the number of positive COVID-19 cases within the school districts.

Each school district can enforce this policy or a policy that is more strict if you so desire. This more flexible policy, if you choose to adopt, will go into effect at a time and date of your choosing. Keep in mind that these contacts will continue to be monitored. The only difference being they will be allowed to attend school and school activities. My hope is that this more flexible policy will protect all aspects of a child’s health, both mental and physical while at the same time allowing healthy children who happen to be a contact to a positive case the ability to continue to experience and benefit from all aspects of our exceptional educational institutions in Newton County. Also, be aware that if conditions warrant, one school district may be adhering to a more strict policy while another school district follows a more flexible policy.

These decisions will be based on specific daily data which could differ by school district or even within the school district itself.

My decision to ask for this flexibility arose from close observation of data, specifically a comparison of positive cases within school districts compared to number of contacts within school districts along with overall county data pertaining to COVID-19.

Please contact Larry Bergner, Administrator, Newton County Health Department at (417) 451-3743 for more information.

Sincerely,

Larry Bergner
Administrator
Newton County Health Department