



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Raymond L. Crowel, Psy.D.
Director

September 8, 2021

Dr. Monifa McKnight
Interim Superintendent
Montgomery County Public Schools
850 Hungerford Drive
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Dr. McKnight:

Investigations into potential COVID-19 cases in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) are conducted by the clinical staff in Montgomery County's Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Disease Control unit. As part of each investigation our team reviews the concerning symptoms, exposure history, and any other relevant illness history to determine if there are other factors or diagnoses which might explain a student's symptoms. This is done in order to ascertain the risk the symptomatic individual poses to others and to provide further guidance to the patient and other individuals who may have been exposed. Our staff then works closely with MCPS staff to identify close contacts and provide guidance on any further actions these individuals should take, including potential quarantining.

Every prospective COVID-19 case in MCPS is evaluated by our staff using the [P-12 School and Child Care COVID-19 Guidance](#) (State Guidance) issued by the Maryland State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and the information, knowledge, and experience we have gained throughout the course of countless contact tracing investigations during this pandemic. Our guidance differs with the State Guidance in only one area: what to do with students who have been in close contact ("close contact students") with a symptomatic student who has no negative COVID-19 test result, no known COVID-19 contact history, and no alternative diagnosis to explain their symptoms.

The State Guidance does not require close contact students to quarantine pending the results of the symptomatic student's COVID-19 test results.

It is the County's guidance that the close contact students should quarantine pending a negative test result from that individual. This guidance is based in part upon the increased contagiousness of variable COVID-19 strains and the percentage of students who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated. We are in the process of training our staff on this guidance to ensure that it is uniformly applied throughout MCPS.

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In addition, our school health team is working closely with MCPS staff to better identify close contacts pursuant to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention definition for [close contacts in school settings](#). We will continue to monitor epidemiologic and surveillance data and amend this approach as needed.

Additionally, DHHS, along with MDH, will be providing every MCPS school with access to rapid COVID-19 testing. The use of this testing platform, in conjunction with all the other safety protocols in place, will help to keep more students in school and minimize the number in quarantine. More specific details about the implementation of the rapid test program will be forthcoming.

Sincerely,

Travis A. Gayles

Travis A. Gayles, M.D., Ph.D.
Montgomery County Health Officer

TG:ss

cc: Raymond L. Crowel, Psy.D., Director
James C. Bridgers, Jr., Ph.D., M.B.A., Deputy Health Officer