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PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

David M. Bayne, MPH
Director

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Health Officer

Dear Thurston County Superintendents and Heads of Schools,

I am writing to update you about the current Thurston County Public Health and Social Services COVID-19 guidance for the 2023-2024 school year which aligns with the [Washington State Department of Health COVID-19 guidance for K-12 schools](#) and highlights key changes in COVID-19 response to cases and outbreaks.

- 1) COVID-19 reporting requirements for K-12 schools include reporting all positive COVID-19 tests performed or interpreted by school staff. Schools administering tests are to follow Washington State Department of Health [COVID-19 self-testing guidance for establishments](#).
- 2) Reporting of confirmed or suspected outbreaks continues to be required as described in [WAC 246-101](#). The definition of a COVID-19 outbreak is 5 or more individuals or 20% or more of students, teachers, and staff in a core group (extracurricular activity, cohort group, classroom, before/after school care, or other group settings) testing positive for COVID-19 within 7 days where there isn't a more likely setting for COVID-19 transmission. Suspect a COVID-19 outbreak and initiate COVID-19 testing when a core group experiences 20% absenteeism including any individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 over three consecutive school days without an alternate explanation. For suspected COVID-19 outbreaks ensure that the affected core group is tested for COVID-19 as soon as possible and contact Thurston County Public Health and Social Services for additional guidance. Mitigation of confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks in most cases includes implementing masking until 10 days have passed with no new cases and twice weekly testing until five days have passed with no new COVID-19 cases.
- 3) The current guidance for individuals with COVID-19 symptoms is the [Washington State Department of Health COVID-19 symptom decision tree](#). Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 should follow the [Washington State Department of Health "What to do if you test positive for COVID-19" guidance](#). Individuals who have potentially been exposed to a person with COVID-19 during their infectious period should follow the [Washington State Department of Health "What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19" guidance](#). Thurston County Public Health and Social Services is sun Downing the COVID-19 flow chart.

- 4) Continue to report school absenteeism greater than 10% to Thurston County Public Health and Social Services. During times when multiple viral respiratory illnesses are cocirculating within a community including COVID-19, RSV, and Influenza individuals who have symptoms of COVID-19 should follow the guidance in the [Washington State Department of Health COVID-19 symptom decision tree](#). Consider additional prevention strategies when transmission levels of viral respiratory illnesses are high. Additional guidance on the control of communicable diseases can be found in the [OSPI Infectious Disease Control Guide for School Staff](#).

As we move forward into fall and winter, prevention is going to be key to maintaining a safe environment in school. I encourage all members of our Thurston County community to stay up to date on their recommended vaccines including those for viral respiratory illnesses, stay home when they are sick, practice respiratory etiquette, and maintain good hand hygiene. This is a dynamic time and as guidance changes, I will continue to update you with the best available guidance.

Please feel free to reach out to the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services - Schools Communicable Disease Team at 360-867-2670 for technical assistance.

Thank you for all you are doing to keep those who work and learn in our schools safe.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D Abdelmalek, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dimyana Abdelmalek, MD, MPH
Health Officer, Thurston County