



Chaffee County Public Health

448 East 1st Street · Suite 137 · Salida, CO · Phone 719-539-4510 · Fax 719-539-7197

Welcome back to the second half of the 2021/2022 school year. There have been many changes to the COVID-19 landscape over the last few weeks of winter break and we would like to take this opportunity to address these changes, as well as discuss what the Omicron variant might mean for schools.

Chaffee County Public Health (CCPH) continues to fully support Salida School District's efforts to prioritize in-person learning for students. Recent data has reinforced that remote learning is not ideal, and in some cases can be detrimental. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has continued to make uninterrupted in-person learning challenging, and CCPH works on a daily basis with your school nurses and administration to help keep schools open.

Over the last few weeks the two most notable changes to the COVID-19 landscape are the CDC's shortened isolation and quarantine guidelines, as well as the emergence of the vastly more contagious Omicron variant.

First, let's address isolation and quarantine. As a reminder, isolation refers to the amount of time a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 needs to stay home from school and other activities. Quarantine refers to the amount of time a person who has been exposed to a positive case of COVID-19 needs to stay home from school and other activities.

CDC has shortened isolation to 5-10 days (followed by required mask wearing for an additional 5 days). CCPH and the school nursing team will determine when your child may return to school. Return to school beyond five days will be based on them being fever free for 24 hours without medication and symptoms having vastly improved. Any positive home test needs to be reported to CCPH and your school nurse. For students who are asymptomatic but test positive, they need to stay home for 5 full days after their positive test (positive test is day 0). All positive students returning to school are required to wear a mask for an additional five days, up to the 10 day after illness/positive test.

Quarantine has also been shortened from 7-10 days to 5 days, again followed by required mask wearing for five more days. Quarantine for 5 days after exposure to a positive case applies to any student who is unvaccinated. Students who are fully vaccinated with their two primary doses are not asked to quarantine, however are required to wear a mask for 10 days in public. As was the practice over the first semester, Salida School District is not quarantining students for routine classroom and lower risk exposures within the school setting, but outside of the school setting (such a positive family member, exposed at a sleepover or during a car ride, etc) students may still be considered close contacts and CCPH will ask them to follow this quarantine guidance.

For some this is welcome news, and for others this is very anxiety provoking. The decision by the CDC to shorten isolation and quarantine is based on the fact that the Omicron variant



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seems to have a shorter incubation time and is maximally infectious for a shorter period of time. Data emerging out of other countries also supports that the Omicron variant is a milder disease, and those that have chosen to get vaccinated, and boosted when eligible, are generally very safe from severe outcomes of COVID-19.

At this time, there are unprecedented levels of COVID-19 in the state of Colorado. The current infection rate will likely move us from “pandemic” to “endemic” soon. It is more likely than ever that you and/or your child will be exposed to, and/or test positive for, COVID-19 over the next month. With everyone ages 5 and older eligible for vaccination, and ages 12 and older eligible for boosters, each family is able to choose the COVID-19 risk they feel comfortable with. The schools will continue to take the virus seriously and to implement the mitigation strategies that they know work, however informing families of each and every exposure to COVID-19 may not be possible.

If your goal is for your family to avoid exposure to COVID-19, please implement all mitigation measures that you can - such as getting vaccinated, boosted, limiting social activities and wearing well fitting, ideally surgical masks, in school and all other public places. If avoiding COVID-19 at all costs is not the goal of your family, it's still important to understand the implications of your actions on the ability to keep kids in school. Staffing shortages are happening across the United States in all sectors, and schools will likely experience the same problem. Please consider allowing your child to be tested weekly through the schools testing program. Keeping positive cases out of the school is one of the most important steps to the success of in-person learning. You can let your school nurse or the front office know if you are ok with your child getting tested weekly. The test is fast, non-invasive (a q-tip around the nostrils) and most kids do it themselves.

As we commence a new year and begin the third year in our COVID-19 response, CCPH would like to thank each and every one of you for your patience, understanding, and stamina. Our schools have taken drastic measures to ensure that the in-person school environment is the safest possible. While COVID-19 is here to stay, there are ways that we can start normalizing how we live with it. The Omicron variant is playing out as predicted, and the next few weeks may feel unsettling. CCPH will continue to work closely with the district and provide the community with data-driven and reliable information and resources.

Sincerely,

Andrea Carlstrom
Public Health Director
Chaffee County Public Health