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Let me begin by saying thank you for your continued patience and support as we respond to the current reality we face with COVID-19. I appreciate your understanding that we make our decisions with the information available at the time and, sometimes, we need to make changes when new information becomes available. This is one of those times.

As you may be aware, two events within the past few days have occurred that will lead to a change in our requirements beginning on Monday, November 30. First, on November 12 Governor Parson released new guidance related to quarantines issued for exposure while at school. Second, on Monday, November 23, the City of Marshfield issued an order requiring face coverings for all individuals ages 10 and up. This communication will detail how both of these decisions impact Marshfield R-1 moving forward.

While the city order allows for a school to be exempt from complying, we believe that being a good partner with the city in limiting the impact of COVID-19 is important. We also believe that it is of utmost importance for students to be in school whenever possible. For that reason, we appreciate the ability to have more students at school and fewer at home due to quarantine under the Governor’s new guidance.

The Department of Health and Senior Services has indicated that their research shows that transmission of COVID at schools is low. When coupled with a requirement for those on campus to wear masks properly, the risk of transmission is further decreased. Finally, student attendance at school is vital to the education and social/mental development of children.

So, beginning on Monday, November 30, all staff are required to wear a face covering when on campus. Additionally, all students in grades 4-12 are required to wear a face covering at all times. Both of these requirements have the following exceptions: waived with a written exemption from a medical doctor; waived when physically active in PE, recess, or athletic activity; waived in band class during rehearsal; and waived when eating/drinking during lunch time or when drinking from a water bottle in a classroom or hallway.

Under the updated guidance, proper use of masks in schools can result in a “modified quarantine” instead of the normal quarantine protocol for school age children. If approved by the Webster County Health Unit, quarantine guidelines will be implemented as described in the next paragraph. The Health Unit board is expected to consider these items at a meeting this week.

Modified quarantine, if approved, allows close contact students to continue in-person school during quarantine when both parties were properly masked.

To support in-person learning, modified quarantine guidelines begin on November 30. Grades 4-12 will be required to wear masks all day except in the conditions mentioned above. If either the infectious individual or others around them are not wearing masks properly, modified quarantine is NOT allowed. If there is more than one COVID-19 positive case linked to a classroom cohort, standard quarantine practices will apply.

At the end of the school day, once a student is off the bus or leaves campus, they must follow normal quarantine guidelines and stay at home under quarantine. Modified quarantine ONLY applies to school hours for the purpose of attending school in-person.

Exposure outside the school day will follow normal quarantine procedures in compliance with local health department guidelines.

Secondary students on modified quarantine are NOT allowed to participate in any after school co-curricular or extra-curricular activities until off quarantine.

School Bus Transportation IS included in modified quarantine guidance.

Modified quarantine does NOT apply to adults. Evidence suggests that adults are more likely to transmit and acquire the virus.

There will still be situations during school hours where modified quarantine can not be applied. It is still important we try and maintain at least 6 feet of distance for no more than 15 accumulated minutes throughout the day to minimize the spread of the virus. Individuals that test positive for COVID-19 will still be required to isolate per health department guidelines.

Marshfield R-1 will continue to be diligent in our efforts to minimize the spread. Proper hand hygiene, frequent classroom sanitization, and disinfecting high touch points at regular intervals throughout the day continue to be a focus.

Please realize that, even though a student may follow the masking requirement and only have his/her mask off during an allowed exception, any exposure during these times with no mask being worn would result in a health department mandated quarantine for the student if he/she is a close contact to someone who tests positive.

As we have all semester, we ask that if a student is not feeling well that they do not attend school. Self-isolating when feeling ill is one of the best measures we can take to help control the transmission of COVID-19 from one individual to another.

Again, the new guidance applies only to school settings and is only helpful in reducing quarantines if each individual does his/her part and wears a mask. Attached to this message is a PDF from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Department of Health and Senior Services summarizing different scenarios under this new guidance.

Thank you again for your support and patience.

In this together,

David Steward, Superintendent