

May 3, 2021

Dear Benton and Franklin County School Administrators,

This updated Health District recommendation addresses considerations for shortened quarantine options for students who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19. The guidance in this letter supersedes any conflicting recommendations conveyed in prior written or verbal communications from the Health District.

Schools in Washington State are required by Governor's proclamation to adhere to the State Department of Health's [K-12 Schools 2020-2021 Guidance](#) that includes conditions for quarantine. Local public health departments cannot remove those restrictions. However, in areas where guidance is not explicit, there is allowance for adaptation to local conditions. When shortened quarantine options were first introduced by Centers for Disease Control and Preventions (CDC) in December 2020, people opting for the shortened quarantine were instructed to follow certain conditions for the remainder of their 14-day quarantine period, including staying 6 feet away from others. When schools in Benton and Franklin counties returned to classrooms using the 3-foot distancing recommended by CDC, students under quarantine could not remain 6 feet away from others so the shortened quarantine options were not initially available.

In response to feedback from parents and school administrators, I have discussed the issue with state and local public health officers, in addition to reviewing the approaches taken by other states. Evidence continues to support that schools are not the primary source of COVID-19 transmission in the community and that there is not sustained transmission in schools.

Based on the above information, schools in Benton and Franklin counties may follow any of the quarantine options in CDC and DOH guidance, including shortened quarantine. 14 days of quarantine is the safest option, but when that is not possible, shortened quarantine options are available if the student is asymptomatic. Return to school can occur:

1. After day 10 without testing
2. After day 7 with a negative test result (test must occur on day 5 or later)

Symptom monitoring should continue until 14 days after exposure. If symptoms develop, the student needs to leave school and isolate. COVID-19 testing is recommended for anyone with symptoms or exposure.

Students still need to wear a mask, adhere to school distancing requirements, wash their hands, avoid crowds, and take other steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Students, staff, families, and Benton and Franklin county residents can help reduce community transmission by getting vaccinated, wearing face coverings, maintaining physical distancing, avoiding large crowds, and staying home if sick or a close contact with someone with COVID-19. More information is available on for both families and educators on our website at covid19.bfhd.wa.gov.

BFHD will continue to monitor cases in schools. If increased secondary transmission or outbreaks in schools occur, additional mitigation measures or more stringent quarantine rules would be necessary.

BFHD will continue to work with you and your school communities to implement DOH and OSPI guidance, monitor disease activity, and respond to suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 that may occur in your schools. I look forward to continuing our regular communication and collaboration as we navigate together through this challenging time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Person". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Amy Person, M.D.

Health Officer, Benton-Franklin Health District