

School Health Advisory Board Meeting Agenda 3/17/2021

Present: Rebecca Abernathy, Lori Balaban, Kristen Carty, Kristy Davis, Christine Eagleson, Eileen Gomez, Leanne Knox, Mark Niehaus, Christina Pitsenberger, Kevin Kirst

Minutes of 2/18/21 meeting approved

Election of Officers

Eileen read the bylaws governing officers.

The board agreed to continue with the present informal structure where there is not a chair who presides over meetings. Eileen will continue to draft the agenda and summarize the year's minutes, which the chair will use to present the annual report to the School Board. Rebecca agreed to serve in the capacity of the chair for the purpose of presenting the annual report. The board will revisit this issue if the current structure becomes inadequate.

Mitigation Strategy Appraisal

Kevin presented the mitigation appraisal tool he developed to help schools evaluate how well they are implementing the COVID-19 mitigation strategies. He developed a Leichardt scale to appraise the 5 key mitigation strategies in various parts of a school. He explained that he and some members of his department plan to visit schools and observe their practices.

Mark complimented the tool as thorough yet user-friendly. He suggested that the observers provide the school with a summary of what the school is doing well as well as a critique of areas for improvement. Perhaps the observers can provide both a narrative and numeric score. Perhaps the environmental compliance person at the health department could provide feedback in an initial observation.

Leanne suggested members of the infection control team might be able to assist in the observation.

Kristy explained that the term "physical distancing" has replaced "social distancing," suggested that school personnel understand that the purpose of the appraisal is to provide constructive guidance and not criticism, and that schools determine a staff member who will serve as the responsible party.

Allergies

Eileen described the challenges the school nurses face regarding evaluating students for allergies since it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish allergy symptoms from COVID symptoms. Area pediatricians encourage parents to aggressively treat allergy symptoms so children can remain in school, but there are some families who may lack the resources to be able to consistently treat these symptoms.

- Suggest nurses take a history including: typical symptoms, time spent outside, known COVID exposures, medications
- Itchiness and sneezing are allergy symptoms not typically seen in COVID
- How are other school divisions handling this issue?
- A parent may decide to COVID test child in the beginning of allergy season
- Wearing masks outside may help lessen allergy symptoms

School nurses should be granted leeway to assess and permit a student to stay in school if the student suffers from ongoing environmental allergies.

Recess

Eileen explained that she advised school personnel that students could share items such as balls, frisbees and jump ropes at recess provided they wear masks, wash or sanitize hands before and after recess, and maintain some distance based on new understanding that surface transmission of COVID is not significant. She went on to explain that school division administrators were concerned because this updated guidance is inconsistent with how p.e. teachers were instructed to develop their lessons with no shared equipment, and were apprehensive that students sharing balls would inevitably lead to close contact if students play games like basketball.

Considering the emerging evidence about virus transmission, the board supports the updated guidance permitting the sharing of recess equipment with masking and hand hygiene as long as students maintain at least an arm's lengths apart from one another. They suggested providing examples of acceptable and unacceptable activities along with the guidance.

Three- or Six-Foot Student Spacing in Schools

In light of an effort to bring back as many students as possible for as much in-person instruction as possible, the board was asked to consider whether less than 6 feet of physical spacing between students in a classroom can be safe. Points in the ensuing discussion:

- The six-foot instructions were determined in the beginning of the pandemic based on the distance large respiratory droplets travel in unmasked individuals under certain environmental conditions.
- Evidence is emerging to suggest that with consistent proper masking, adequate ventilation, and proper hand hygiene, less than 6 feet of physical distance between students in the structured nature of a classroom would be safe. Caveats to understand include: unless the rules for contact tracing change, students would need to quarantine if seated closer than 6 feet to a student who tests positive; students would need to be spaced at least 6 feet apart when they remove their masks to eat lunch.

<https://academic.oup.com/cid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/cid/ciab230/6167856>

<https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/mayo-clinic-research-confirms-critical-role-of-masks-in-preventing-covid-19-infection/>

Disposition of Siblings When a Student Leaves School with Illness Symptoms Eileen explained that there was a community-wide decision (in a consortium of physicians, health department and school officials) that schools nurses send home siblings of students who develop symptoms at school. The consensus was that it is reasonable to send siblings in the same school home when the parent arranges to get the sick student, but to exclude siblings in other schools at the end of the school day (i.e. exclude them beginning the next day). The ill student and siblings are permitted to return when one of these criteria are met: a physician provides an alternative diagnosis, the parent provides a negative test result for the sick student, or after 10 days for the symptomatic student and after a quarantine period for the siblings.

Illness Symptoms in Fully Vaccinated Individuals

While the CDC now allows for fully vaccinated people to not quarantine when exposed to someone with COVID-19, nothing changes regarding exclusion from school or work if they develop illness symptoms. They should be referred to their healthcare provider and/or for testing. Reinfection can

occur (maybe especially with variants), and nobody with symptoms should be in schools. Spreading non-COVID illnesses puts pressure on other individuals to be excluded and have to seek medical evaluation or testing to rule out COVID.

Excessive and Blanket Quarantine for Sports

A player on a field hockey team tested positive and since the varsity and JV teams scrimmaged for 20 minutes, both teams and coaches were quarantined. Some parents of the JV players strenuously objected and requested a closer analysis of the positions and time of the players relative to the one who tested positive. The health department quarantined the entire team because the 6-foot determination does not apply under conditions of physical exertion, and 15 minutes is not a necessary and sufficient determinate of exposure if an individual is exposed to the direct expulsion of respiratory droplets such as through coughing or “hocking” expectorant.

Student athletes should wear masks while competing. The VHSL does not require it and teams who wear masks may encounter opposing teams who don't. Student athletes and their parents need to understand that COVID is a deadly disease and can be serious even for young people. We still do not know the long-term effect of COVID even in youth who have had mild cases. Need buy-in and mask enforcement from coaches. Perhaps an attestation from the coach about mask-wearing's impact on quarantine might be helpful.

Rebecca mentioned the guidance from the AAP regarding the medical evaluation of athletes after recovering from COVID before they return-to-play. She urges ACPS to require another sports physical for athletes who contracted COVID after their initial annual sports physical. A gradual supervised return-to-play protocol is recommended. Eileen communicated this guidance to the ACPS athletic trainers. [COVID-19 Interim Guidance: Return to Sports and Physical Activity AAP](#)

[When youths with COVID-19 can return to physical activity](#)

[Interim Guidance on Return to Play VAAP](#)

Vaccine Hesitancy

Eileen and Leanne shared that although there seems to be very high vaccination rate amongst teachers, they learned recently that about 40% of the employees in transportation are either not interested in getting the vaccine or are unsure.

Because there is a racial disparity in vaccine acceptance, Mark recommends a locally produced video targeted to Black members of the community and reports a video in Spanish is in production.

Vaccine hesitancy video <https://vimeo.com/509624177> [Move 2 Health Equity - ASL on Vimeo](#)

The board recommends encouraging all employees to get vaccinated. Mark reports that people who may be uncomfortable with the new(ish) vaccine technology of Moderna and Pfizer be referred to the Johnson and Johnson version, if there is eventually a choice.

Other ideas include arranging for peer testimonials and gathering the reasons for vaccine hesitancy to provide targeted counselling.

There is no HR mandate for vaccination and data on rates of vaccination as well as the vaccination status of individual employees is not available.

Lunch

Eileen shared the following from the last SHAB meeting with ACPS leadership:

Talking restrictions while eating: students currently attending school are not contracting COVID frequently suggesting current practice of students eating in their classroom is safe, but younger child have been demonstrated to have a lower viral load. Restricting conversation during lunch may be considered for older students although silent lunch is discouraged. Suggest playing music or a podcast during lunch then allowing a 10 minute or so masked conversation period. Encourage eating outdoors, but require 6 foot spacing between students.

A board member reported that her high school daughter has had a negative lunch experience being forced to have a silent lunch in the classroom even on sunny warm days.

Social interactions are important for children especially since they have not been able to see each other for so long and have spent so much time alone in front of screens. Allowing students to connect with one another is essential for their mental health. The board strongly recommends that students be permitted to eat outside and the choice should not be teacher-dependent, particularly at the high school level, where the ratio of students to supervising teachers to can be high. Since students should maintain 6 feet from others while eating, teachers may still need to remind students to space adequately.

Students can bring things to sit on such as towels or yoga mats. Rebecca suggested using tarp cut into 2 x 2 or 3 x 3 squares. Other options include plastic sitting mats.

<https://www.reallygoodstuff.com/rugs-and-mats/c/e21/?q=%3Arelevance&page=0&pageSize=>

Upcoming Meetings

April 14

May 12