



## **Updated Joint Guidance Regarding COVID-19 Mitigation in Schools**

Created by the Department of Health & Senior Services (DHSS) and the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE)

### **Coordination of Efforts among School Districts and LPHAs**

As schools across Missouri are now returning for the fall semester, DHSS and DESE encourage collaboration and consistency in processes, practices, and guidance, especially when multiple Local Public Health Agency (LPHA) jurisdictions operate within the boundaries of a single school district. As LPHAs are considering efforts to mitigate transmission of COVID-19, they should collaborate together in an effort to make a consistent and routine practice for the issuance of orders of isolation and quarantine across all similar situations. Schools and LPHAs should work together to deploy mitigation and containment strategies that create the least amount of disruption to the learning environment as possible, while taking deliberative and intentional steps to protect public health.

### **When Clinically Appropriate, LPHAs Should Consider Issuing Isolation or Quarantine Orders, Rather Than Recommendations**

LPHAs should utilize the full array of their authorities to best protect public health in clinically appropriate situations when compliance with isolation or quarantine is not followed and public health is at risk. By issuing isolation or quarantine orders immediately upon receipt of a positive test result or identification as a close contact, rather than a recommendation, schools and LPHAs will be in the best possible position to mitigate transmission. It should be stated clearly by the LPHA that it is their expectation of the individual that they will not attend school or school-related activities consistent with their guidance as public health professionals.

### **The Importance of Initiating Contact Tracing Within 24 Hours**

DHSS has taken steps to assist with the identification of COVID-19 positive cases among those between the ages of 3 and 21 by including the age of each positive case, where known, in the hourly reporting of new positive cases provided to LPHAs. As utilization of EpiTrax becomes more familiar and comfortable to LPHAs, this information will continue to be available, even after DHSS no longer provides hourly updates.

LPHAs and local school district personnel should have an integrated understanding and approach to mitigation efforts including social distancing of at least six feet, proper hygiene, masking, cohorting, and other practical implementations to ensure the lowest likelihood of transmission in the school setting among students, teachers, staff, and others. The effectiveness of these implementations and controlling countermeasures will substantially impact the level of effort necessary to ensure compliance with the August 7, 2020 [Order](#).

Those LPHAs having difficulty in complying with this order should contact DHSS to identify additional tools, resources, strategies or assistance to ensure that contact tracing is initiated within 24 hours; viewing the order as a recommendation without force of law is not adequate.

## Schools and LPHAs Should Collaborate to Maximize Contact Tracing Effectiveness

LPHAs are empowered by law to engage in public health investigation and mitigation efforts, and retain the authority for doing so. This is not a power expressly granted in law to governing bodies of schools. Best practice in this area suggests that a collaborative approach between schools and LPHAs will yield the fastest and most effective means for mitigating the transmission and risk of infection. LPHAs are encouraged to work closely with school officials as a resource to maximize the effectiveness of contact tracing in a timely fashion. Even in these circumstances, however, contact tracing remains the responsibility of the LPHA and is to be completed in accordance with the August 7, 2020 [Order](#).

## Additional Guidance for Ensuring Effective Social Distancing

Governing bodies of a school system should consider the following non-exhaustive list of options:

- Seek advice, input, and collaboration from LPHAs to find creative approaches;
- Utilize alternate spaces for learning environments, other than the normal classroom, which may better enable social distancing, including gymnasiums, outdoor spaces, large commercial facilities available for lease, or others; and
- Utilize a hybrid model of distanced and onsite learning to allow students to stagger attendance, resulting in fewer people in the school building at one time.