



Length of Quarantine Update for BPS Parents and Staff

Background: On December 2, 2020, the CDC announced recommendations for options to reduce the length of quarantine for persons identified as close contacts to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Following review and discussion by a team of medical experts in Yellowstone County, the following statement was released by Riverstone Health on 12/09/2020: “RiverStone Health wants to emphasize that a reduction in the number of days for quarantine does have an increased risk of post-quarantine spread of infection; however, a reduction to a 10 day quarantine balances the socioeconomic impact that quarantine has on our community with a slight increase in risk of post-quarantine spread. RiverStone Health will support the reduction of quarantine to 7 days if a person tests negative after day 5 with a PCR test or with an antigen test as close to Day 7 as possible. It is important to recognize that the availability of local testing of asymptomatic people is limited and RiverStone Health is not able to expand community testing at this time.”

Will Billings Public Schools shorten the length of quarantine for students identified as close contacts and what will the new guideline be?

- In order to reduce the economic and academic burden that may result from the 14 day quarantine, Billings Public Schools will adopt the 10 day quarantine for students in accordance with the Riverstone statement above. However, at this time, due to lack of available testing options for the general public for asymptomatic individuals seeking release from quarantine after day 7, **Billings Public Schools will only accept a minimum of the 10 day quarantine period for students at this time.** This may be reevaluated in the future if testing options for asymptomatic individuals become readily available in our community.

Will BPS staff be allowed to return to school after a 7 day quarantine period?

- Billings Public Schools is allowed a very minimal order of Binax Now rapid COVID-19 tests from the state. Our allotment of these tests is very small in comparison to the size of our district and it is unlikely that more of these tests will be available to reorder once the tests have been used. Taking into consideration that testing is not available in our community to release asymptomatic persons from quarantine after day 7, the most efficient utilization of this allotment of tests may be for the purpose of releasing staff members from quarantine after day 7 in an effort to resolve staffing shortage concerns. This consideration is being discussed at the administrative level and more information will be provided to school staff in the future regarding this possibility and the process that must be followed. There will not be enough of these tests available to offer this option to students, therefore, students will be required to follow the 10 day quarantine guideline.

Will returning to school early from quarantine look the same as returning after day 14?

- No. There are conditions that must be followed in order to allow students and staff to return prior to day 15. According to the Yellowstone County United Health Command the “close contact” individual must have remained symptom free for the 10 day period and there must be careful symptom monitoring, correct and strict mask wearing, and social distancing measures taken along with all other hygiene measures (handwashing, disinfecting, etc) through day 14.

Does allowing students and staff to follow the shortened quarantine guidelines increase the risk of spreading Covid-19 in schools?

- Yes. The CDC and Riverstone Health still consider the safest length of quarantine to be 14 days. There is a slightly increased risk for transmission of the virus involved with bringing students and staff back to school/work prior to the full 14 day quarantine. In order to allow for the shorter length of quarantine, additional safety precautions must be taken to help balance this increased risk of transmission. If a significant rise in COVID-19 cases is observed within BPS following this change to a 10 day quarantine, then a return to a minimal 14 day quarantine will be discussed.

What additional precautions will be taken in order to allow for the shortened 10 day quarantine?

- Safety for students and staff is of utmost importance. In order to safely allow for a shortened length of quarantine, cooperation from parents, students, and staff to comply with safety measures will be necessary. In accordance with recommendations from the CDC and from local pediatricians and health providers, the following measures must be followed:
 1. Individuals returning to school on day 11 (following a full 10 day quarantine) must have remained asymptomatic during the full 10 day quarantine. If the student displays or develops symptoms at school upon early return from quarantine, the student will be sent home from school and it will be suspected that the student has COVID-19 until proven otherwise. The student may not return to school until proof of a negative test is presented or if the parent chooses not to have their child tested, the student must remain home for 10 full days following symptom onset and must be fever free for 24 hours and back their normal health before they may return.
 2. Students may attend but may NOT participate in activities that involve increased risk for releasing respiratory droplets and removal of their mask until after day 14. These activities include PE, team athletics/sports, or band.
 3. The parent/guardian of the student must complete the “Early Release from Quarantine Agreement” form before their child is allowed to return to class on day 11. If the parent/guardian refuses to sign this agreement or the conditions of the agreement are not met, then the student must remain home for the duration of their 14 day quarantine period.
 4. Masking precautions must be strictly followed in all schools for **ALL students and staff**. Mask breaks should only be allowed when individuals are 6 feet apart and preferably outdoors if weather allows or when staff are in their room/office alone. When masks are removed for eating lunch or snacks, students should be spaced as far apart as possible (preferably 6 feet) or if students must eat in close proximity to each other, there should be a barrier device, such as a plexiglass divider, between students. For High School students, supervision during open campus lunch may not be possible and the parent/guardian will be expected to discuss the importance of masking and distancing during this time for students who are returning early from quarantine. Masking during exercise is the most current recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) so masks should only be removed during periods of activity IF individuals are spaced 6 feet apart. This recommendation should be taken into consideration during PE and recess activities. For more information regarding the most up to date guidance from the AAP see:
<https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/12/04/sportsguidance120420#>
 5. Any students who have been identified as close contacts who are unable to comply with mask wearing must complete the 14 day quarantine before returning to school in accordance with the directive from the Yellowstone County Unified Health Command.
 6. Billings Public Schools will continue to encourage frequent handwashing, disinfection and cleaning of surfaces, cohorting measures, and physical distancing as much as possible.
 7. Symptom monitoring by parents is extremely important. Parents should refer to the “COVID-19 SYMPTOM CHECK GUIDE FOR PARENTS.” Moving forward, school staff will also be adjusting our procedures to follow this symptom guide in accordance the the “Montana Outbreak Response Protocol’s: K-12” document which may be viewed at this link:
https://covid19.mt.gov/_docs/Outbreak%20Response%20Protocols%20K-12.pdf

Do I have the option to still follow the 14 day quarantine if I choose to do so?

- Yes. Parents/guardians or staff members may opt to adhere to the 14 day quarantine instead of the 10 day option and there will not be any negative consequences/implications should they choose to do so.

Additional References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html>
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html>

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