



Bernards Township School District

November 20, 2020

Dear Bernards Township School District Families,

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised much concern that we thought we would address, as it relates to school. While we cannot discuss confidential health information and individual cases, we would like to address some of the questions that we have heard in an effort to allay your fears.

When we learn of a positive case, school nurses begin the investigative and contact tracing process to identify all close contacts. Close contacts are considered to be anyone who has been within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes during a 24 hour period. An infected person can spread COVID-19 (shed virus) starting 48 hours prior to testing positive or showing symptoms. For that reason, we consider anyone who has been in close contact for the two days prior, to be close contacts. The CDC provides information about contact tracing and close contacts [HERE](#).

In addition, with each investigation, school nurses complete case reports and submit them to the Bernards Township Health Department for every positive case, or any close contact of a positive case, so they can then complete contact tracing and track local transmissions. It is important, if you are contacted by the health department, that you share relevant information during this process.

Once the District identifies the close contacts, phone calls are made to advise each of them of the situation. A letter is also emailed to each **Close Contact** to inform them of the need to quarantine, monitor for symptoms and about medical evaluation and testing. Since close contacts need to quarantine, we work as quickly as possible to identify them and communicate with them.

After all of the close contacts have been notified, the Bernards Township School District sends a **General Notification** to all district staff and families to advise them that an individual has tested positive for COVID-19. We will tell you what building the case is associated with and if it is also related to an athletic team or another school group. By the time the general notification has been issued, close contacts will typically already have been informed. Therefore, if you are learning of a case through a general notice, your child has not been identified as a close contact related to that case and would have no restrictions to their activities.

There have been cases recently when you received a General Notice which stated that there was “no exposure at school”. This could be for a number of reasons. Sometimes, it could involve a staff member or student that is “virtual” and so they have not been in school. It could be that it is a student in a Blended Group (A or B) who may not have been in school for more than 2 days and so no one is defined as a close contact. (This is one of the reasons why we established cohorts and had them come into the

buildings for back to back days instead of everyday or every other day, to limit the number of students exposed.) It could also mean that the person has been absent and quarantining themselves already or they have been traveling and therefore, have not been in any school building.

As of today, we have not had any COVID-19 cases that have been traced back to a school transmission. This is a testament to the care and screening that all of you have been doing at home, keeping students with any illness out of schools and activities until they are medically evaluated. And it is reflective of the efforts of the administration, nursing team and staff members, as they enforce the policies that we have established and been working on since last March, to maintain a safe and healthy school community.

We have found that recent cases have been traced back to indoor sports venues, athletic activities, many of which are associated with club teams, gyms, and most commonly, family or friend gatherings. Household parties or even small multi-family gatherings at one location seem to be the common cause for required quarantining of individuals or groups of people.

Certainly, the local and NJ State situation will impact schools. We consult with our district physician who works in two N.J. hospitals and in six school districts so he is very familiar with what is happening around us. Our school nurses work collaboratively with the [Bernards Township Health Department](#). The Health Department is working hard to track cases, communicate with township residents and attempt to mitigate this highly contagious disease. To see the latest data on Bernards Township COVID cases click [HERE](#). Somerset County maintains a COVID-19 Dashboard which can be accessed [HERE](#). Daily COVID-19 cases are posted for each town. The State of New Jersey Department of Health also has a website devoted to COVID-19 with weekly updates. Click [HERE](#) to view.

The BTSD COVID-19 FAQ for Families can also be a resource for you and can be found [HERE](#).

While we don't know what the next few weeks will bring, we are asking for your cooperation as we will in all likelihood see more COVID-19 in Bernards Township. Please continue to promote frequent handwashing, social distancing and mask wearing. We request that you limit your exposure to high risk situations, so that you do not unknowingly expose yourself and others to the virus. What you do today will affect whoever you are around tomorrow.

If you have a health concern, please reach out to any district nurse, or to the Bernards Township Health Department. We are all here to support you. We wish you all good health and a safe and Happy Thanksgiving.



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