



Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H.
STATE HEALTH OFFICER

November 19, 2020

Mr. Ryan Hollingsworth
Executive Director
School Superintendents of Alabama
534 Adams Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36104

Dear Mr. Hollingsworth:

Thank you for all you continue to do to provide ongoing educational opportunities to Alabama's children during this pandemic. It is clearly a challenge requiring all of our collective efforts to educate our children in an environment which also protects the safety and health of students, teachers, and staff.

Alabama's current data for the age group 5-17 years is moving in a disturbing direction. As of November 13, 2020, school age children accounted for 8.5 percent of all COVID-19 cases in Alabama. This represents a 1 percent increase in cases compared to 1 month ago but a 0.5 percent increase in the past 10 days. While this increase may appear small, keep in mind that every case of COVID-19 may infect at least two to three other persons. Further, while the statewide percent positivity of SARS-CoV-2 testing in Alabama has climbed back to a disturbing 10 percent, test positivity rates in children in the school age group are almost 15 percent. In addition, while hospitalizations in children remain less than 2 percent of the overall numbers, 13 children in Alabama have been diagnosed with Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome of Childhood (MIS-C) and more are likely as the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) continues to review records. MIS-C is a very serious and life-threatening condition of children, as a result of COVID-19, and may have long-term implications for multiple organ systems, including cardiac dysfunction.

With case numbers rising to some of the highest we have seen in this pandemic, ADPH urges ongoing adherence to all measures to reduce transmission of COVID-19. Until a SARS-CoV-2 vaccine is widely available for all, we have only the limited interventions of social distancing, respiratory hygiene, cloth face coverings, environmental cleaning procedures, and isolation and quarantine time frames to keep people well. To combat the upward trend of cases in Alabama's school age children, we need to redouble our efforts to prevent disease, save lives, and preserve the ability of our healthcare system to function. ADPH needs your continued support of our messaging to parents and staff concerning the vital nature of the consistent practice of all preventive measures.

Regarding school children, ADPH has encountered numerous situations where parents, not understanding measures including isolation and quarantine, have approached healthcare providers to test children for the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 and excuse children from home quarantine. As we know, given the incubation period of SARS-CoV-2 of 2 to 14 days and recent reaffirmation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that shortening home quarantine could miss over 10 percent

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of incubating cases, close contacts should adhere to the current period of home quarantine to reduce disease transmission.


Upon discussion with healthcare providers, ADPH has found that most providers are not aware that children they are asked to evaluate are identified close contacts of COVID-19 cases. Further, several providers in urgent care groups advised that parents, upon learning of their child being a close contact, present immediately to the urgent care drive through SARS-CoV-2 testing sites, request a screening test, and receive a copy of the result without seeing a provider. Parents not understanding the incubation period of this disease and appropriate timing of testing creates a significant problem for school systems when parents demand that their COVID-19 exposed child return to school prior to completing home quarantine. This can propagate the spread of COVID-19 within a school population. ADPH has examples of where this has happened in several school systems resulting in increased cases of COVID-19 in students and teachers.


In order to correct situations where providers were, based upon unclear information, providing orders contrary to ADPH isolation and quarantine time frames, ADPH provided the attached Health Alert Network (HAN) on October 30, 2020. To ensure broad distribution, ADPH sent the HAN to the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, the Alabama Board of Medical Examiners, the Alabama Board of Nursing, and the Alabama Hospital Association. ADPH believes this will clarify isolation and quarantine, as well as reduce conflicting messaging that is hampering public health's ability to reduce the spread of this virus.

ADPH is developing additional parental education to help persons understand the critical need for adherence to current scientific information. ADPH is committed to the emerging science and will update current management tools when literature supports the safety and effectiveness of practices.

ADPH appreciates your support and welcomes your feedback regarding all issues related to this pandemic. Our ADPH COVID-19 School Response Team conducts biweekly meetings with school nurses and is happy to provide a similar sounding board for superintendents if needed. Please contact Carolyn Bern at 334-206-5436 for any questions or clarification as we work together in this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,


Karen M. Landers, M.D.
District Medical Officer


Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H.
State Health Officer

SH:CB:SK
Attachments
cc: Lisa Woodard