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November 18, 2020

Dear Paul,

Thank you for reaching out to the Gloucester County Health Department. We are in receipt of your correspondence dated, November 16, 2020 and hope the below response assists in addressing your concerns. As the County's lead public health agency, our focus revolves around protecting the public's health, preventing the spread of disease, promoting positive health behaviors and preparing the public for emergencies, especially during this pandemic as we continuously closely monitor the current rising numbers we are seeing.

In most instances, it is ultimately the school district's decision to determine the best course of action for their school system/their students. During the pandemic, school Districts make these decisions with County Health, State Health and in accordance with the *NJDOH Covid-19 Public Health Recommendations for Local Health Departments for K-12 Schools* guidance document.

Should Covid-19 transmission levels in the region reach a very high level (red), as referenced in the Regional Risk Matrix, the school is required to go to fully remote learning. The region is currently moving to "orange" status/level and is being closely monitored.

In outbreak situations, County Health can evaluate the situation with the school while using the matrix and help them move forward safely and/or come to a decision for closure if deemed necessary. These decisions are made with support from the State Health Department (Regional Epidemiologist and the School Health Team).

The confirmed cases at Clearview Regional High School District have been investigated and contact traced and at this time, are not epidemiologically linked to the school. As a result, there is no outbreak.

In instances where a school is unable to adequately contact trace and exclude potentially exposed students and staff, a temporary closure may be warranted. However, this has not been the case with the involvement of your school nurses. The Gloucester County Department of Health maintains ongoing and open communication with your District's school nurses, as well as with Superintendent Horchak. The school nurses are doing a tremendous job with expedient contact tracing and the exclusion of those affected staff and students that need to remain out of school. This is a vital step in helping to prevent in- school transmission of Covid-19.

Do be assured that every lab-confirmed Covid-19 case, their direct contacts and each situation in total, is evaluated thoroughly and determinations are made based upon the information obtained. Informed decisions are then made to guide the actions taken. These decisions differ for each school/district and for each instance.

The majority of the cases you list (i.e.: 25 total and 12 within the last week), are epidemiologically linked to exposures outside of school as opposed to one another in-school. These outside exposures are not considered or counted as school cases. However, in these instances, in order to ensure full transparency of all that is taking place, notification is still made to the school community as a way to remind everyone involved to continue to be diligent and steadfast in preventing the spread of COVID 19 by staying home if sick, social distancing at all times (in school, the office, as well as in the community), wearing a face covering correctly (indoors and outdoors) and always practicing good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene.

We remain available to you with any additional questions or concerns at: (856) 218-4136.

Sincerely,


Annmarie Ruiz
Health Officer

C: T Jones - Director
D. Jankauskas – Public Health Nursing Director