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Return to school/work guidance updated *COVID-19 testing recommended, even for mild symptoms*

Washington State Department of Health (DOH) recently updated the guidance for return to school/childcare/work following a positive symptom screen for COVID-19 when there is no known exposure.

School districts in Benton and Franklin counties are required to follow this guidance for students or staff that develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19. We need cooperation from providers in order for the school districts to follow through with the DOH guidelines.

Health care providers need to be aware that the DOH guidance does not allow staff/students to return to school if symptomatic unless they have had a negative COVID-19 test or an alternative diagnosis that explains all of the symptoms. This diagnosis should be provided to parents/guardians for the schools. A diagnosis of common cold is not sufficient for a child to return to school. Examples of alternative diagnoses made by health care providers include childhood rash illnesses, acute otitis media, or a lab-confirmed diagnosis such as strep throat or a non-COVID-19 viral pathogen, like influenza. If testing for other viral pathogens, it is strongly recommended to test for COVID-19, as well.

Benton-Franklin Health District is requesting assistance from health care providers to ensure adequate testing for K – 12 students and staff, as well. Testing is recommended they are symptomatic or have been identified as close contacts of someone with COVID-19. Children often present with mild symptoms and lower disease severity than adults. If the provider's office does not offer COVID-19 testing, there are free community sites at both the HAPO Center and CBC West – both in Pasco, for Benton and Franklin County residents.