

Dear Merrimack Families~

A short time ago we learned that a staff member at Merrimack Middle School has tested positive for COVID-19. It is very important to note that this case is completely unrelated to recent positive cases widely reported in the district. This staff member is a general service provider, meaning that by the nature of this person's job responsibilities this individual typically has contact with students in both grades and across both cohorts at the middle school.

We have spent the afternoon consulting, as we always do in such cases, with NH Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS) to begin the contact tracing process. In this particular case, because of the larger than average number of *potential* contacts due to the job responsibilities of this individual, this process may take a bit longer than it has in other similar situations we have already encountered in the district. As a result of the possible delay in contact tracing due to the *potential* number of close contacts this case could involve, and out of an abundance of caution intended to limit any possible larger spread, Merrimack Middle School will be closed to in-school instruction for the next two weeks and will instead transition to remote instruction. Likewise, all sports and after school activities will be shut down for two weeks.

Merrimack Middle School Principal Adam Caragher will be in touch with middle school students and families tomorrow to provide information about what to expect in terms of curriculum, instruction and schedules this coming week. In addition, contact tracing will begin in earnest tomorrow led by representatives from NH DHHS. In the meantime, I urge you all to remember the following facts:

1. Merrimack Middle School will be shut down to in-school learning only. Remote learning will continue
2. Merrimack Middle School is closing for two weeks out of an abundance of caution. At the moment there is only one confirmed case of COVID-19, and we seek to keep it that way, or limit transmission, by making this decision.
3. If any student or staff member is deemed a close contact that does not automatically mean that they will become positive.
4. Close contact is defined as closer than six feet, for longer than ten minutes, **with or without a mask.\***
5. This determination is made through careful and scripted investigation by school and district health staff in conjunction with NH DHHS. If you do not fit into this category NH DHHS will not contact you.
6. Under no circumstances will we disclose the name or position of any COVID positive student or staff member. For anyone to do so is a violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and could be subject to significant penalties under federal law.

We have always said that COVID-19 is a community problem and will best be solved by a community's commitment to addressing the challenges it brings. We thank you for your patience and understanding as we face this newest challenge together. Please be assured that more information will be provided as it becomes available. And finally, to Merrimack Middle School families and students, please know that we will work very hard to make the next two weeks as productive and learning focused as we can. We need your help to make that happen. Mr. Caragher will be in touch tomorrow to give you specific information as it relates to achieving that goal.

Thank you.

Mark McLaughlin  
Superintendent

\*corrected from original message sent on 10/17/20