BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL STAFF SCREENING AND SYMPTOM TRACKING DURING COVID-19

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Discussions about school openings and closings related to COVID-19 have been taking place for months, but, regardless of the direction that your school has decided to take this fall, it's important to have an understanding of the best practices for screening and symptom tracking in order to keep your staff, students, and community safe.

Let's start with the basics. We know that information on COVID-19 symptoms continues to evolve, with some folks experiencing little to no symptoms and others becoming significantly ill. The CDC states that symptoms appear typically appear 2-14 days after exposure.

Policies and Procedures for Screening Employees

Screening and monitoring of your employees for symptoms of COVID-19 is recommended by both the CDC and Wisconsin Department of Health Services for the safety of employees and visitors entering a workplace. If your district chooses to follow this recommendation and screen employees, it is important to have a process and policy in place for both the screening itself and for actions related to apparent symptoms and/or a positive test. Putting policy into place allows you to respond in an objective manner when an employee displays symptoms of COVID-19 or has a positive test.

The WASB has provided sample language in their employee handbook revisions and policy guidance. Additionally, you can find a model screening procedure on M3's COVID-19 business resource page.

Screening Best Practices

As mentioned earlier, the knowledge surrounding COVID-19 continues to change, so we recommend following the guidance of experts, such as the CDC, DPI, DHS, county or local municipal health departments, and county or municipal orders or ordinances while developing your screening procedure. We also recommend engaging your local provider systems in developing these policies.

So, how will you screen your employees?

One way that you can evaluate your staff for symptoms is through temperature screening. The EEOC permits employers to measure employees' body temperature before allowing them to enter the worksite. In order to avoid discrimination, it is best practice to screen all employees every day.

The CDC has also created recommend questions that you can use to identify symptoms and facilitate conversations and next steps, but administering these questions in-person isn't always the best course of action, as you may expose those who conduct the screening.

A colleague of mine shared a story of a Wisconsin school district that, upon bringing employees back to school earlier this summer, had employees stop at the office to complete a health questionnaire. The employee who administered the questionnaire tested positive and actually exposed other employees to COVID during the screening process. We want to help you keep your employees safe and avoid situations like this.

To limit the potential for spread as you conduct screening, M3 has developed an app that utilizes the CDC's recommended questions. In less than a minute per day, employees self-screen and document their screening. The documentation is available for identified contacts from the district to access, and, if an employee's response causes concern, they are prompted to contact the district and local health care providers.

The information that you collect through screening must be kept confidential under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and only people with a true need to know should be notified of the identity of an employee with a fever or other COVID-19 symptoms. Before you put your screening procedure into place, we recommend notifying employees of screening expectations, and how you plan to keep the information confidential.

It's likely that the guidance around COVID-19 will continue to develop, particularly as the school year kicks into full gear. Screening for symptoms should be a part of your risk management strategy for your staff, students, and your community. Reach out to your Account Executive for more information on creating a screening procedure and policy that is safe, confidential, and effective for your school.

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