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August 11, 2020

Stillwater County Public Schools,

Unprecedented times throughout the Covid19 Pandemic have set in motion many alternatives to life as normal. Stillwater Billings Clinic would like to take this time to offer our support of the local mask directive, as put in place by the Stillwater County Public Health Department, for schools throughout Stillwater County. Stillwater Billings Clinic understands and recognizes the importance that schools play in our student's mental, physical, and social health development. The safety of our community's students, teachers, and staff continues to be a top priority. Appropriate face masks in combination with proper hand hygiene, staying home when ill, and maintaining physical distancing all aid in this.

While masks do not eliminate the risk of transmission, peer reviewed scientific studies from some of our nations most respected medical organizations have shown that wearing appropriate face masks have significantly slowed the transmission of COVID19. Both the American Association of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention encourage the use of masking in public schools where there is mild to moderate, or higher, community spread of COVID19. Stillwater County continues to remain at sustained, moderate spread of community transmission of this novel virus.

The premise behind masks is rather simple; respiratory droplets from individuals that may unknowingly be infected get trapped inside the mask, making it harder for transmission of this virus to others. When two protective masks/barriers are used, it makes that transmission significantly harder. Following current Covid19 tracing guidelines, if an entire classroom of students and the teacher were wearing appropriate masks and maintaining a physical distance of 3 feet and one student were to become ill with Covid19, only that student would be sent home and quarantined. Current data shows that mask to mask contact decreases the likelihood of transmission of the virus enough that others in the classroom would not likely be sent home to quarantine. On the opposite hand, one individual without a mask can spread respiratory droplets into the air for up to 6 feet around them, potentially infecting numerous individuals. In a classroom setting without masks if an individual were to become ill with Covid19, all students and the teacher may be sent home to quarantine for 14 days. This is not considering those students that may become ill and the contacts they have both in school and outside of school. The ripple effects throughout the community could be immense. The use of masks can not only prevent the spread of this illness but serves as a needed resource in keeping children in the classroom setting.

Understanding that our students, staff, and teachers do not live at the school and will return home to loved ones daily; the use of masks combined with education, hand hygiene, social distancing, and other mitigation strategies can also help to prevent spread of this illness to our most vulnerable populations.

Please let this serve as our official recommendation for universal masking while in the school system. Together, as a community we will work through this and are happy to support our school districts to help keep our students, teachers, and staff safe in whatever way we can.

Sincerely,

Stillwater Billings Clinic and Stillwater Billings Clinic Board