

October 29, 2020

Good Evening this is Dr. Todd Rhodes, Superintendent of Schools along with Dr. Carol Shackleton from Gothenburg Health with a school and community update. As we know the TRPHD risk dial has moved to pandemic/red this week. We continue to have communication with Two Rivers Director Jeremy Eschliman and Drs. Shackleton and Dalrymple from Gothenburg Health weekly to discuss regional and local data trends, school protocols and other pertinent information. We continue to monitor Gothenburg School's pandemic plan in relation to our region and local community. While we know the importance of seeking guidance and gathering data regionally and locally our #1 metric in determining the placement of our SCHOOL risk dial is the number of confirmed cases we have within our school community. Currently through the afternoon of October 29th we have low numbers of positive cases (less than 1% of our PK-12 student body and 2% of our school staff). More encouraging is that through contact tracing guidelines, it has been determined that transmission of COVID-19 has occurred outside of our school. With that said, Gothenburg Schools will remain in the Orange risk tier of the school pandemic plan and students will continue to attend school in person. It is important to note that both Two Rivers and Gothenburg Health are recommending schools stay open at this time. And now here is Dr. Shackleton.

Thanks for letting me join you today. Many of you have seen Mr Bowman's open letter in the Times and Leader, as well as on Facebook. I can't emphasize enough how vital his information is. We are seeing an increase in Covid cases in the school, in the community, and in the hospital. The hospital is averaging 6-10 pts a day instead of our usual 2 or 3, and over half are covid. These people are sick, have a prolonged treatment and prolonged recovery time. Rather than discharging them in 2 or 3 days, they are needing to stay 7-10 days, sometimes longer. It is increasingly difficult to transfer them to other regional hospitals due to similarly increased census at those locations. Nursing homes can't take patients if they have had positive staff or residents, and shut their doors to transfers for literally weeks at a time.

No one is immune to this problem. Locally we have increased from 2 or 3 patients a day in our respiratory clinic to 18 or more. Our hospital acute staff are all working extra shifts, and becoming ill from exhaustion and exposure, resulting in even more overtime shifts, more exhaustion. We are doing our very best to treat everyone that comes to our door, but we have already had to transfer out a couple regular medical patients because we had no beds left. Our percentage of positive tests has gone from 2% last spring to 5% this summer to a current 15-20%. We have had several instances of illness spreading between adult siblings, between grandchildren and grandparents – Family that we normally consider to be safe so we become lax about masking and distancing. Then one person is a carrier but not yet symptomatic, and suddenly several family members are exposed, and the most elderly or health compromised of them tend to become ill.

How can you help? Wear your mask all the time when you leave your house. Maintain your social distancing. Wash your hands often. Avoid social gatherings. Stay home if you don't feel well. Cover your cough. Be careful – even around family. Will these measures stop Covid

completely? No. But it will slow down the transmission to a level where we can handle the influx in the clinic and the hospital, and keep our schools and businesses open.

People have asked me about Halloween. I know this is an important celebration for the kids, but please do it safely. Have the kids wear cloth masks with their costume, and you need to wear a mask when you answer the door. Don't let them grab candy out of a basket, but have one person in the household drop the candy into their sacks, preferably with gloves. Try something fun, like dropping the candy down a pvc pipe chute to the kids rather than handing it to them directly, in order to maintain distancing.

We don't need to stop living, but we do need to respect each other and protect each other by doing the masking, distancing, and other measures. I know this is getting very old and tiresome to hear. This is not about politics or people's right to choose. Not unlike speed limits, public sanitation, and water quality, It's about public health. It depends on all of us participating in order to make a difference.

Thank you Dr. Shackleton. Due to our amazing students, parents and staff adhering to our safety protocols we have had an awesome fall. But, we must continue to be diligent in wearing masks, maintaining social distance where possible and practicing good hand-washing hygiene now more than ever. Together we will see this through.

Thank you and have a great evening.