

BOARD OF MADISON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
September 23, 2021, Special Meeting Minutes
COVID/Quarantine Guidance

On Thursday, September 23, 2021, a special meeting of the Board of Madison County Commissioners came to order at 4:00 p.m. in the Second Floor Court Room of the Administrative Office Building in Virginia City, Montana, with Commissioners Dan Allhands, Jim Hart, and Ron Nye present. Laurie Buyan, Commissioners' Assistant, was present to take minutes.

Those people on the attached sign-in sheet were present for the meeting. Those on the attached list of names and phone numbers were present via Webex. Jeff LeVeque, IT Support Specialist, was present to administer the Webex connection.

COVID/Quarantine Guidance: Dan Allhands, Commission Chair, opened the meeting by explaining that the Board of Health held a meeting on the 21st of September and developed a recommendation related to COVID and quarantining close contacts. Emilie Saylor, Public Health Administrator, read the recommendation stating that they had a lot of discussion and guest input and that the portion requiring masks in the schools comes from a multilayer mitigation approach that's recommended through the American Academy of Pediatrics and by the CDC. She added that she has discussed it with the County Attorney's office and that they have been advised not to attempt to place an order on the school districts but to approach the school districts and compel them to develop policies in order to place masks in the schools. She noted it is not in the order, but in the meeting they discussed testing capabilities within the schools and careful assessment of students daily for symptoms and dismissing symptomatic students from the classroom. This aligns with what has been referenced in previous meetings regarding the Havre Public School safety plan which the Commissioners have all reviewed and appreciated. She noted that they have had good feedback from the school boards supporting this type of policy. However, if the recommendation is approved, there won't be a change regarding masks in the schools today, the change today would be for the Public Health Office to discontinue close contact quarantines. They would need to contact the schools to request that they implement other mitigation practices to replace the contact tracing. She also noted that eliminating close contact quarantine does not align with CDC recommendations at this time so they would be veering from the recommendations that we frequently site. She discussed that CDC recommendations to include those employed in sensitive and high risk areas, including nursing homes, daycares, group homes, care facilities, and corrections, adding that each of those entities can create their own policies and asked that this be included in today's motion. She added that both nursing homes are in outbreak status right now from staff member infections, so that would be a population we would want to protect.

There was discussion about COVID virus transmission in young kids, working with school boards and administrations, previous meetings regarding masking and quarantine issues, mitigation, keeping the spread to a minimum, and keeping kids in school. Dan Allhands stated that he feels this is a form of compromise. Jim Hart stated that it is a great recommendation but he is not comfortable with making recommendations right now about nursing homes because we're about to come into some guidelines from above. Ron Nye agreed that the recommendation was good and stated that he likes the guidelines from the Havre School. He added that the Board should not override anything the schools are trying to do and that the main goal is to keep the schools open and keep the kids in school. All three Commissioners expressed support of the recommendation and appreciation to Public Health Staff and the Board of Health for the recommendation.

Emilie responded that if we approach this as a compromise, we are satisfying our duty up front and we are dependent on follow-through from the school boards, so after the decision is made we'll need to have a plan to approach the school boards and compel them to follow through with those policies after the fact. She added that she is willing to go to school board meetings and advocate for that and assist in developing policies. She also asked that each of the Commissioners go as well. The other portion Emilie discussed is if we aren't going to quarantine those who work in those sensitive areas like the nursing homes, please include the ability for a person to self-identify as a close contact and receive a quarantine excuse through the Public Health Office.

Based on the recommendation of the Board of Health, Jim Hart moved to approve the recommendation of the Board of Health relative to SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) infections, to eliminate close contact quarantine, except for those who are in the household, who shall be quarantined according to the Public Health quarantine order. The Board of Health recommends schools in Madison County adhere to masks within the class when there is one positive exposure (school faculty, staff, or student) for two weeks from the last date of exposure. In addition, the motion included allowing self-identified voluntary quarantine so that the Public Health Office can provide an excuse for time off work if needed. Ron Nye seconded the motion.

Following the motion, Emilie requested that because it's a heavy administrative load for them to release quarantines that are currently in place for close contacts, she would like to leave them at status quo and finish out the quarantines for those individuals or at least have a number of days to process them. The Board agreed that the Public Health Department should suspend contract tracing immediately and finalize the current quarantines by October 1, 2021. There was further discussion by those present about the voluntary self-reporting, CDC recommendations for nursing homes, current and prior practices at the nursing homes, how this would apply to those testing positive, masking in classes for two weeks when there is a positive case in that class, allowing for common sense and individual responsibility, flexibility with guidelines and parental responsibility, shifting from mandates to recommendations, and if the change in quarantine policy applies to everyone or just schools. Emilie responded that it is not specific to schools and that positive cases will still be quarantined, but close contacts will not be.

Following this discussion, Chairman Allhands called for the question. All voted aye and the motion carried.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

Dan W. Allhands, Chairman
Board of Madison County Commissioners

Date Approved: October 5, 2021

Minutes prepared by:

Laurie Buyan, Executive Assistant

Attest: _____
Paula McKenzie, Clerk and Recorder, Madison County