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Contagious Illness/Infectious Disease Recommendations

Messiah University

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Purpose: Several contagious illnesses pose a threat to both individuals and the entire campus community. These illnesses include viral, bacterial, and fungal infections, and most commonly affect the upper and lower respiratory tract, gut, and skin. To address the ongoing threat of illness, it is helpful to have a policy on how community members should respond to illness, and what precautions should be taken to prevent spread. In order to determine appropriate prevention of spread, it is helpful to identify the mechanism of spread for the most common illness:

Airborne:

These illnesses include (but are not limited to): Tuberculosis, COVID-19, Varicella (chickenpox), Meningitis, Measles, Pertussis, and Influenza. Our best hope at preventing individual infection and campus wide spread of airborne illnesses in most cases is vaccination. Varicella, Meningitis, Mumps, Pertussis (TDAP) and Measles vaccines are mandated for our students. Vaccines for COVID-19 and Influenza are encouraged on an annual basis, though not mandated. Over students are also screened for Tuberculosis and if they are high risk, undergo further testing.

Masks

are available in several locations on campus, including the Engle Center. If someone is ill they are encouraged to avoid crowded/public spaces. If this person lives on campus, they should not report to campus until they are feeling improved and/or can tolerate wearing a mask while indoors with others during their contagious period. Faculty/supervisors are asked to work with the ill individual to accommodate missed time/assignments with no reason. In some cases, when illness is extended beyond a few days, faculty or supervisors may need to ask for medical documentation of illness.

Persons at high risk for poor outcomes from these illnesses or who cannot be vaccinated, are also encouraged to mask preventatively.

Respiratory/Droplet:

Most airborne illnesses can also be spread through droplets, but there are some illnesses that require the re

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Contact:

Contact spread can occur with viral, fungal, or bacterial infections. Common examples on college campuses is MRSA (staph infection), ringworm, or mononucleosis. Topical medications are often required to treat these infections and prevent their spread. Cleansing frequently used surfaces (i.e., gym equipment) and engaging in frequent handwashing can go a long way to prevent the spread of these types of infections.

Sexually transmitted:

Sexually transmitted diseases exist on most college campuses, and Messiah is no exception. Abstaining from sexual intercourse prior to marriage/monogamy or use of prophylactic barriers such as condoms/dental dams are the recommended prevention. Some sexually transmissible diseases (Herpes simplex, gonorrhea, syphilis, HPV) can also potentially be spread through saliva/kissing, while others (HIV, Chlamydia) generally require oral penetrative intercourse. Sexually active persons should be encouraged to have regular STI screenings, which can be performed confidentially and at a low cost in the Engle Health Center.

Foodborne:

Many bacterial, viral, and parasitic infections are spread through contact with food. Food poisoning caused by contamination and is generally not contagious, however, there are viruses and bacteria that

such as salmonella and clostridium. The most common cause of foodborne illness in the United States is norovirus. Norovirus (also known as the cruise ship virus) spreads rapidly from person to person. Norovirus causes intense gastrointestinal symptoms, such as pain, vomiting, and diarrhea. It replicates in the GI tract and is expelled from the body in vomit and stool. This virus is not killed by alcohol-based hand sanitizers, so the best course of action is handwashing (for a minimum of 20 seconds) and bleach based cleaning of bathroom surfaces. To prevent spread of this illness, persons who have diarrhea or vomiting should not engage in food preparation for others while ill and wash their hands well and frequently even after illness resolves, as the virus often continues to be shed weeks after the symptoms recede.

The burden of contagious illness prevention falls on each of us. There are things we all can do to prevent our own illness (receiving vaccines, washing hands) and things we must do to prevent spreading our illnesses to others (washing hands and surfaces, masking, staying away from others). We do these things to care for ourselves and our