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What Parents/Caregivers Should Know about COVID Mitigation Strategies for the 2022-2023 School Year

On August 11, 2022, the CDC released an updated Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools to Support Safe In-Person Learning. The New York State Department of Health and New York State Education Department jointly encourage all schools to utilize the CDC guidance as they plan for the 2022-2023 school year. This guidance from the CDC represents the most up to date COVID-19 mitigation strategies for the K-12 setting while considering COVID-19 Community Levels. Schools may choose to layer prevention strategies based on CDC guidance if necessary when considering local community COVID-19 levels and the specific needs of their school community. They are encouraged to consult with their local health departments (LHDs) on COVID-19 mitigation strategies. Parents/Caregivers are encouraged to communicate with school administrators if they have any questions about the COVID-19 mitigation strategies being utilized at the school. Below you will find a summary of the CDC Operational Guidance.

Vaccination

- Staying up to date on vaccinations is essential to prevent people from getting severely ill with COVID-19. Children ages 6 months and older are all eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Children over five years are eligible for a booster. Additional information may be found at ny.gov/vaxtoschool.

Quarantine

- The CDC no longer recommends quarantine except in high-risk congregate settings, such as nursing homes. The CDC does not generally consider schools to be high-risk congregate settings. The CDC recommends that all people with a known or suspected COVID-19 exposure regardless of vaccination status or history of prior COVID-19 infection follow current CDC exposure recommendations which include 1) wearing a well-fitting mask or respirator for a full 10-day period, 2) getting tested at least 5 days after close contact or sooner if symptoms develop.

Staying Home When Sick/Symptomatic

- The CDC continues to recommend that people stay home when sick. Any student or staff member who has symptoms of respiratory or gastrointestinal infections, such as cough, fever, sore throat, vomiting, or diarrhea, should stay home.
- Testing is recommended for people with symptoms of COVID-19 as soon as possible after symptoms begin. Those who are at risk for getting very sick with COVID-19 who test positive should consult with a healthcare provider right away for possible treatment, even if their symptoms are mild. If an individual tests positive for COVID-19 and does not have a regular health care provider, evaluation for treatment can be obtained by either calling 1-888-TREAT-NY or visiting the NYS COVID-19 ExpressCare Therapeutics Access Website.
- People who are symptomatic and awaiting COVID-19 test results or have tested positive for COVID-19 should follow CDC's Isolation Guidance.

Isolation

- People who have tested positive or are awaiting COVID-19 test results should remain home and follow the CDC's Isolation Guidance. The isolation period may vary based COVID-19 symptoms.

- If someone who tested positive has no symptoms, isolation may end after day 5. If someone has symptoms, isolation may end after day 5 if they are fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and symptoms are improving.
- People should wear a mask through day 10 after ending isolation when they are feeling better (fever-free for 24 hours without use of fever-reducing medication and symptoms improving).
- Antigen testing (e.g., Rapid Test or home test) is not required to end isolation; however, some schools may allow use of the “test-based strategy” to potentially shorten the length of time for post-isolation mask use. With two negative tests 48 hours apart, people may remove their mask sooner than day 10. If a person’s test result is positive, they may still be infectious and should continue wearing a mask and wait at least 48 hours before taking another test and continue taking antigen tests 48 hours apart until two negative results are received. This may mean masking and testing beyond day 10.

Note: After having ended isolation, if COVID-19 symptoms recur or worsen, restart isolation at day 0. Day 0 of isolation is the day of symptom onset. Staff and student’s parents/guardians should be advised to talk to a healthcare provider about their symptoms or when to end isolation.

Testing

- Antigen test – refers to a same day or home test. These are often self-administered tests.
- PCR, NAAT – (Polymerase Chain Reaction or Nucleic Acid Amplification tests) these are tests that are sent to labs and results take days, these tests detect the presence of the virus.
- Screening testing is no longer required to be offered or provided by schools. However, testing provides an opportunity for people who test positive to connect to treatment and allows schools to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Resources have been made available to schools to support testing. Schools may consider requiring testing before certain activities, such as choir, or contact sports. Community testing also remains available and can be located at <https://www.hhs.gov/coronavirus/community-based-testing-sites/index.html#ny>.

Masking

- Universal masking is not currently required in the school setting but is recommended in indoor public settings when a community is in a High COVID-19 Community level. Local health departments (LHDs) and school districts and private schools may consult and collaborate on masking decisions.
- Wearing a well-fitting mask is recommended for those who were exposed and for isolation. Please see the Quarantine and Isolation sections above for additional detail. Additionally, people may choose to wear a mask because of increased risk for serious COVID outcomes or for another reason.
 - If a school is experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak masks can be added as a prevention strategy, regardless of the COVID-19 Community Level, to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19 during an outbreak. Schools should confer with their local health department during an outbreak.
 - According to the Commissioner’s Determination on Masking in Certain Indoor Settings Pursuant to 10 NYCRR 2.60 masking is required for public transportation conveyances and transportation hubs for all persons two years of age and older who are able to medically tolerate a face covering/mask, regardless of vaccination status.