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Frequently Asked Questions Regarding School Reopening
from Nassau County and Suffolk County Departments of Health
August 2020

Nassau and Suffolk County Departments of Health understand that school districts in our community face many complex challenges upon reopening. Without question, the health and safety of students and staff remains our paramount concern. Nassau and Suffolk County Departments of Health also appreciate that not all schools and school districts have similar needs and challenges, and therefore emphasizes a flexible approach to addressing questions. That being said, the following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), we hope will assist the school districts and communities as we head towards the beginning of school year. These FAQs are dynamic and subject to change as more information is learned and guidance is provided by New York State.

Glossary of Terms:

Case: individual with laboratory confirmed COVID-19

Close Contact: close contact is defined as being within six feet of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time (ten minutes or more) for 48 hours before case's symptom onset to case's isolation. One would also be considered a close contact if someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 coughed or sneezed on you, or shared food.

Proximate Contact: proximate contact is someone in the same enclosed environment as the case such as a classroom, office, or gatherings but greater than 6ft from a person displaying symptoms of COVID -19 or someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Persons Under Investigation (PUI): a close contact who has developed symptoms of COVID-19 and is waiting on confirmatory test.

Isolation: isolation is the separation of someone who is infected with COVID-19 from others to prevent further spread of the disease.

The isolation period for COVID-19 is at least ten (10) days from onset of symptoms (or test date if asymptomatic) and 72 hours fever free (without fever reducing medication) and other symptoms are improving.

Quarantine: quarantine is the separation of someone who has been exposed to a COVID-19 case and now has the potential to develop the disease. This is done to prevent the possible spread.

The quarantine period for COVID-19 is fourteen (14) days from date of last contact with a case, provided no symptoms have developed.

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COVID-19 Representative (CR): designated school staff responsible for COVID-19 communication and planning within their school community and liaison to local health departments.

LHD: local health department which includes both Suffolk Department of Health (SDOH) and Nassau County Department of Health (NCDOH)

Questions:

Should the school district have a designated representative for COVID 19?

Yes, school districts should designate an internal COVID-19 representative (CR). This could be, for example, one CR for the district, or one CR for each building or a number that makes sense for the district. CRs are responsible for answering questions from students, faculty, staff, and parents or legal guardians of students regarding the COVID-19 public health emergency and plans implemented by the school. CRs should also work closely with the Nassau and Suffolk County Departments of Health and other schools to monitor public health conditions and jointly develop monitoring strategies.

Should the CR have any training?

Yes, Nassau and Suffolk County Departments of Health recommend that the CR be trained in the basics of COVID-19 and contact tracing and suggests the course offered by Johns Hopkins University:

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/covid-19-contact-tracing?edocomorp=covid-19-contact-tracing>

How does a school district contact the local health department to report a COVID-19 case in their district?

For all Nassau County calls questions from parents or members of the public please call our Call Center at 516-227-9570.

In Suffolk County, school staff can call 311 to report a case in their district.

Note: information will be taken about the case and general guidance may be provided. Specific guidance, however, cannot be provided until the case investigation is complete. Typically, case investigations are done within 24 hours of receipt of a positive test result.

Would you recommend masks for all students even with 6 feet social distance?

Yes. Face coverings should be the norm, not the exception. Breaks from mask wearing should be allowed for meals and other coordinated activities, provided physical distancing is in place.

What are the recommended protocols if a student tests positive?

Student should immediately be placed on isolation at home for at least 10 days. School staff should assist the local health department in contact tracing efforts by providing a list of probable close contacts (defined as being within 6 feet of the infected student for at least 10 minutes). The identification of close contacts should begin 48 hours before the student became symptomatic, or 48 hours before the student was tested for the COVID-19 virus if asymptomatic. Identified close contacts should also remain at home for 14 days of quarantine from the date of last exposure to the infected student.

Please note a Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (rT-PCR) test result would most likely come to the local health department first through the NYS Electronic Clinical Lab Reporting System (ECLRS) system. While LHDs are notified about PCR tests regularly, LHDs may not be notified about the rapid antigen tests.

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If during a case interview, the LHD identifies that case as a student in school, we would reach out to the school administration to inform them of the positive case and conduct contact tracing. If it is rapid antigen test, the student/family may get the result before the LHD. In that situation, we would expect the medical office that ordered the test to reach out to us, or perhaps the family. If the school district is aware of a positive test among its students or staff, but has not heard from the LHD, please reach out to us so that we can confirm this case. Case investigation/contact tracing would then proceed after NCDOH or SCDOH is notified.

SCDOH and NCDOH are responsible for case investigation and contact tracing in their counties. School districts should support case investigation and contact tracing efforts by confirming attendance, sharing rosters, etc. Case investigations are typically done within 24 hours of receipt of a positive test result. School districts should have plans in place related to community notification and operations while investigations are underway. SCDOH and NCDOH provide isolation or quarantine orders to all cases and contacts in their respective counties. In addition, those under isolation or quarantine will be monitored daily. When the isolation or quarantine period has ended, a letter from the local health department confirming release will be provided to each case and contact. Students and/or staff can provide the letter to their school district to return.

Contact tracing and quarantining of close contacts is initiated upon receipt of a positive test result. In addition, only contacts of the case are quarantined, not contacts of contacts.

What are recommended protocols if a staff member tests positive?

Similar to the question above, the staff member should be under home isolation for at least 10 days, with contact tracing as outlined above. We elicit current employment on case investigation and would reach out to the school when we find out. In addition, please note that each LHD investigates its own county cases. Confirmed cases in faculty, staff and administrators that live outside the school's county will be investigated by the jurisdiction in which they reside. In these cases, please know that Nassau and Suffolk County Departments of Health will work closely together.

What are the recommended protocols for a symptomatic student on a bus?

Local health department would not be involved for symptoms only; we would only begin an investigation based on a positive virus test (nasopharyngeal swab rT-PCR or rapid viral antigen). If the student tests positive, any close contacts of the student, (including those on the same bus) may be subject to quarantine. This does not apply to antibody tests.

What are the recommended protocols for suspected cases of COVID-19?

Students and staff with symptoms of illness should not attend school. It is recommended that individuals and/or families consult their medical provider to determine if COVID-19 testing is warranted. Note: notification and contact tracing is initiated upon receipt of a positive COVID-19 test result. No action is taken for suspected cases. Students and staff who test positive for COVID-19 should follow the established CDC/NYS DOH guidelines for ending isolation. All residents who test positive are monitored daily by the LHD contact tracing staff and will receive a letter from their LHD confirming release from isolation.

Students and staff with other illnesses (e.g., cold, flu, strep throat, etc.) should follow existing school policy for return. It is recommended that staff and families consult with their medical provider for guidance.

Suffolk and Nassau Counties have comprehensive networks of family health centers that serve the uninsured and underinsured. More information can be found out: <https://suffolkcountyny.gov/Departments/Health-Services/Patient-Care/Health-Centers> or <https://www.lifqhc.com/>, respectively.

In addition, COVID-19 testing sites can be found at: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/find-test-site-near-you>

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What should someone do while waiting a pending COVID-19 result?

Staff as well as students who have been tested for COVID-19 or who have signs and symptoms of COVID-19, should remain at home and not come to school until results are known. A positive result will require additional isolation of the case and close contacts elicited as described above. Quarantine and/or notification will be determined by the local health department in conjunction with the school district. Laboratory testing may take days until results are determined. The local health departments have no control over laboratory testing.

What information is confidential?

NCDOH and SCDOH will only discuss names of cases with appropriate personnel consistent with HIPAA and public health law. No parents or other students will be informed of names or identifying information. Please do not email names of individuals as well, as they are not secure.

To what extent must students/staff quarantine/isolate after:

A singular positive case?

Identified close contacts should be placed on quarantine for 14 days from date of last contact. This could affect students, teachers, or other school staff.

NCDOH and SCDOH recommends that close contacts get tested for COVID-19. Students and staff should consult their medical provider for guidance.

Multiple positives?

This would be more complicated, depending on if they are in the same cohort (a cluster), or positives in multiple cohorts (an outbreak). Those in a cluster would isolate at home, and a presumably small number of identified close contacts would quarantine at home. An outbreak across multiple cohorts would involve a larger number of people identified as close contacts, and thus more of the student population under quarantine. This would require coordination with NYS DOH in addition to the school district.

Should isolation occur within singular classroom? Grade level? Building? District?

Isolation would apply to the person who tests positive. Any close contacts identified for quarantine will likely be in the same classroom or lunchroom. Schools should try to limit the number of cohorts to the greatest extent possible. For most children that number is going to be at least two, the bus and the classroom.

If an elementary student tests positive and the students within the class/cohort are all in masks and 6 feet apart in class must the class be quarantined?

This scenario would need to be decided on a case-by-case basis. There would be many factors considered including age of students, time spent in the classroom, size of the classroom, etc. If all were wearing face coverings and practicing social distancing, the likelihood that further positive cases are identified from that cohort is minimal. These individuals might be considered proximate contacts and should be monitored for signs and symptoms but may not part of the contact tracing effort. The school districts may decide to make notifications to their students and staff in the classroom or building who are not close contacts.

If students are 6 feet apart in a classroom with no masks and one tests positive, is the class quarantined?

Yes. In this scenario, there will be a higher likelihood of identifying other positive cases related to the index case. Students wearing masks lower the rate of transmission/new cases even when one is exposed to a case.

If the spouse of a faculty member presents with a positive COVID test, for how long should the employee isolate? Should a negative test be required to return to work?

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The employee would be considered a close contact of the spouse, and would be subject to quarantine for 14 days from date of last contact with the spouse. The employee may return to work after completion of the quarantine period; no test is necessary unless the employee develops symptoms.

If a faculty member who has wide-spread access to the building tests positive (ie - custodian, principal, etc.) to what extent should isolation occur amongst the rest of the population? What steps should be taken before a return?

The faculty member should be under home isolation; if anyone meets the definition of a close contact with that faculty member, the close contact(s) should quarantine for 14 days. The faculty member may return to work after 10 days of isolation provided that person is fever free for the last 72 hours without the use of fever reducing medications and symptoms (if any) are improving.

A child, who rides a school bus, has a parent who was notified that she (the parent) tested positive for COVID-19 after the child left the house for the bus stop. The parent called the principal to alert her of the test results: the student had already arrived at school and was in class. What protocols need to be put in place for students/families that were at the bus stop, students and staff who were on the bus, and classmates and teachers of the bus riders?

The child should be sent home to be placed on quarantine. The child is most likely a close contact, but not a case/did not test positive, therefore there is no action that needs to be taken for any of the other persons mentioned. LHD will not quarantine a contact of a contact.

Helpful Resources:

<https://www.coursera.org/learn/covid-19-contact-tracing?edocomorp=covid-19-contact-tracing>

<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/new-york-state-contact-tracing>

[https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/Pre-K to Grade 12 Schools MasterGuidance.pdf](https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/Pre-K%20to%20Grade%2012%20Schools%20MasterGuidance.pdf)

<http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/reopening-schools/nys-p12-school-reopening-guidance.pdf?source=email>