

## Saratoga County Schools & COVID – FAQs

This communication is intended to serve as an informational tool only to support families, schools and health care providers during the reopening of local schools in accordance with New York State guidelines. Interested parties should review the New York State guidance closely and consult their own counsel for legal advice.

### **IMPORTANT CONTACT INFO**

- Who do we contact at the health dept when we hear about a positive case at school?

Each County Health Department is notified of positive cases from their residents' lab results. However, if you are made aware of a positive case within the school you should call the COVID hotline to discuss next steps. We can be reached at **518-885-2276**

- What are the phone numbers/locations of testing centers for suspected cases?

If a student or staff member is sick with suspect COVID they should be connecting with their provider and discussing COVID testing with them. The health department also keeps a list of COVID testing sites on our website below. If the student does not have a provider and needs help facilitating testing the parent/guardian can call the Saratoga County Public Health Services (SCPHS) COVID command center at **518-885-2276** [www.saratogacountyny.gov/departments/publichealth/covid19/](http://www.saratogacountyny.gov/departments/publichealth/covid19/)

- How will families know if there is a positive COVID-19 case in their school district?

The school district will alert families, faculty and staff; and New York State Online Dashboard (COVID Report Card <https://schoolcovidreportcard.health.ny.gov/#/home> ). Individuals who were exposed to a lab-confirmed COVID-19 positive case will receive a phone call from the Saratoga County Public Health Services COVID Command Center and will receive further instructions at that time. If you have reason to believe that you or your child were exposed, and you have not been contacted by SCPHS please call 518-885-2276 and a SCPHS contact tracer will assist you.

- What happens if a student or teacher in my child's classroom tests positive for COVID-19?

With support from SCPHS, your school will provide instructions. SCPHS will likely recommend your school close the classroom for at least 24 hours. Being in the same classroom does not necessarily mean your student was exposed to COVID-19, so you might not get a call from our Contact Tracing Team. For example, if an adult who later tests positive for COVID-19 entered the room for a brief period but did not go near any students, this would generally (depending on the details of the situation) be a very low risk situation. If you are worried or believe that you were exposed to COVID-19, you should discuss your concerns with your primary care physician and/or SCPHS (or your local health department if you do not live in Saratoga County).

- What is the most important thing for families to remember?

Check on your child's health every morning. Take a temperature reading and look for symptoms of illness before your child leaves for school. Do not send a child to school if they have a fever (even if it goes away when treated with fever reducing medicine), feel ill, or have had contact with someone with COVID-19.

### **Masks and PPE**

- Are all staff and students going to have to wear masks and PPE?

We defer to the NYSDOH guidance for in person instruction at Pre-K to Grade Schools During the COVID 10 Public Health Emergency Document published July 13<sup>th</sup> by NYSDOH.

Page 2 "...required to be worn any time or place that individuals cannot maintain appropriate social distancing. However, if face covers are always to be worn, responsible parties should allow students to remove their face covering during meals, instruction, and for short breaks so long as they maintain appropriate social distancing"

- What kind of face covering is appropriate for students, faculty and staff?

Cloth face coverings (or disposable "surgical style" masks) that cover both the nose and mouth are required in all school facilities, including on school buses. For activities where mask wearing is not possible (such as while eating) a six-foot distance, must always be maintained. SCPHS is recommending cloth masks for most situations. SCPHS is not recommending fleece neck gaiters, bandanas, or scarves. Face shields worn without other appropriate face coverings are not an acceptable alternative. Some staff members will need additional personal protective equipment (PPE) at times. Please consult with your school's medical director or nurse.

- Can my child be exempted from having to wear a mask?

SCPHS recommends all students wear a mask to protect other students, faculty and staff. Exemptions can be granted by primary care physicians, but only for rare, pre-existing conditions. If your child is having difficulty wearing a mask, consult with your primary care physician regarding techniques that will help your child adapt to a mask.

- Is a doctor's note needed for children who cannot wear a mask/or do they need to stayhome?

If a student cannot wear a mask they do not need to stay home. Per the NYSDOH guidance for in person instruction page 10 "Students who are unable to medically tolerate a face covering including students where such covering would impair their physical health or mental health are not subject to the required use of a face covering".

SCPHS recommends a doctor note be on file, but this is up to the School's policy.

## **Contact Tracing**

- What is the School Nurses role for contact tracing?

School nurses have been sent the John Hopkins Contact Tracing course for review. If a positive case is identified within a school the local health department will work with the School Nurse and the COVID Liaison and leadership at the school district to identify close contacts. We will review where the positive person was and who would be considered a close and proximal contact that needs to either be quarantined or self-monitor for symptoms.

- Does the class need to stay home until results of tests are known?

No. Until we have a positive test result any contacts of a suspect case are okay to continue to go to school. Anyone they meet becomes a contact of a contact at that point. We do want to keep anyone out of school that is sick but until we have the test results for a case no one in the school would need to stay home. This is unless the individual school has their own protocol.

- If Public Health is notified of a positive case, will you be contacting the school to notify them?

Yes, once we find out about a positive case, we will reach out to the School COVID Liaison. If the School finds out about a positive case and hasn't yet heard from the Public Health Department, they should notify the COVID Command Center at 518-885-2276.

- If a student lives in a different county are the schools supposed to notify Saratoga Public Health or the students home county?

Both. Saratoga and the home county of the student should be notified.

- If a student or teacher test positive does that mean the whole class or all their classes for teachers are to be placed on quarantine and out of school for 14 days?

This is more of a situational question. If a classroom had someone that was positive and the class was in an enclosed environment (no open windows, shut doors, etc.) for a long period of time we may end up needing to quarantine the entire class. It is important to have seating charts. This will help the public health staff during their case investigation to figure out who needs to be quarantined.

## **Symptoms and Screening**

- What happens if a child shows potential symptoms of COVID-19 while at school?

A: The student should immediately be separated from other students. The student's family will need to arrange pickup of the student and will be directed to consult with their health care provider.

- What symptoms will constitute a child to be sent home?

This would be up to each school's individual policy. If a student has a coronavirus symptom(s) that could be related to COVID we recommend sending them home and asking the guardian to follow up with the pediatrician. Below is a link for the list of symptoms from the CDC.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

- Do we automatically send home any child or staff who has answered yes to ANY of the screening questions?

This would depend on the school's policy as well and the screening question. If someone has direct contact with a positive COVID 19 person, they should not be in school and should be quarantined by the local health department where they reside. If they have a headache but are prone to headaches and have a doctor's note on file, they likely would not need to be automatically sent home. So, this question is situational...what the screening questions are and what did the person say yes to.

- What is the procedure for when we send a student home with COVID symptoms?

If a student is sent home due to COVID symptom(s), the parent/guardian should be encouraged to call their pediatrician. If they do not have a pediatrician, they can call the COVID hotline to review symptoms and see if a test is needed.

- What is needed for a student or school employee to return to school after experiencing COVID like symptom(s)?

According to the New York State Department of Health, in order for a student or school employee to return to school, the individual will need a note from their health care provider, a negative COVID test result and **have symptoms resolved**. This ruling may have exceptions and be subject to change in the future.

- If a student tests positive for COVID-19, can the individual's siblings still come to school?

No, siblings who reside in the same household will be placed in mandatory quarantine by the SCPHS COVID command center (or other local health department if they live in a nearby county). They will be unable to return to school until SCPHS releases them from quarantine. This will be at least 14 days after the positive COVID-19 case is released from isolation OR the last contact with the isolated person.

- If an individual who tested positive is released back to school, what do you do if they become symptomatic a month down the road? I understand that since they already had COVID they would test positive for some time after recovery; how are we to handle such?

This would be a case by case situation and you would need to notify Saratoga County Public Health to receive guidance and recommended next steps. According to the CDC, there is no widely accepted definition of what constitutes SARS-CoV-2 reinfection.

- The CDC proposes using investigative criteria for identifying cases with a higher index of suspicion for reinfection. At this time, the CDC proposes two time windows for investigation as listed below:
  - For persons (with or without COVID-19-like symptoms) **≥90 days** after initial infection/illness; and
  - For persons with COVID-19-like symptoms **45-89 days** after initial infection/illness.

To identify potential cases of reinfection a combined public health investigation, health care assessment and suggested advanced laboratory diagnostic testing and genomic testing of paired specimens may need to be performed.

### **Isolation/Quarantine**

- How long is a student out of School, is it 10 or 14 days?

Any person who is COVID positive is isolated for at least 10 days. If someone is a contact of a person who is COVID positive they will be quarantined for 14 days from the last day of exposure. The local health department will determine when a person is released from isolation and quarantine. A release letter will be sent to the individual.

- What happens if a family member of a student, faculty or staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

A: The family member will be isolated and the student, faculty or staff member will be placed in mandatory quarantine by SCPHS (or other local health department if they live in a nearby county) and will not be able to attend school until the health department releases them from quarantine.

- How will I know what to do if my student is placed in isolation or quarantine?

A: The SCPHS Contact Tracing Team will walk you through the process and provide support throughout the isolation or quarantine process. If you have questions, you can call the SCPHS COVID Command Center at 518-885-2276.

- How do we know it is safe for someone to return to school after a positive test result?

Once someone has finished their 10-day isolation (assuming they have recovered and are 24 hours fever free and have greatly improved symptoms), the public health department will officially release the individual from isolation and will provide that individual with a release letter.

- Are teachers and/or school personnel considered “essential employees” and allowed to continue to work?

The guidance on essential workers comes from New York State Department of Health and is interpreted on a case by case basis by the local and state health departments. Only in exceptional circumstances are essential employees permitted to continue working during their quarantine period, and school faculty and staff will not typically meet the criteria for working during their quarantine period due to the nature of their work. School district employees who are exposed to COVID-19 would quarantine at home and consult their local health department for further guidance.

- Can a person on quarantine return to the school building if they have tested negative for COVID-19?

Because the incubation period for COVID-19 can be up to 14 days, it is important that people complete their 14-day quarantine, even if they have a negative COVID-19 test.

- If a positive case is released from DOH by phone we are running into some issues with documentation for their return (such as they are employees and would like to return but we do not have any written documentation that they have been released). Whatever we could tweak here would be great so that we are covered for their return.

Saratoga County Public Health will fax releases to employers, if requested by employee. There needs to be confirmed consent from the employee to fax the release letter to the employer.

- Some parents/ staff have been symptomatic, test negative and send us a text for documentation. The text, for obvious reasons, does not include the individual's name, so it makes it difficult to say we have test results when it is just in text form.

Saratoga County Public Health can verify test results, with patient permission.

## **OTHER**

- Do students need to follow NYS immunizations if they are enrolled in remote learning only?

We have been informed that NYS is working on more guidance for this, but they are saying if the children are using school services they should still try to catch up on their vaccinations.

- Are school cafeterias restricted to operating at 50% capacity? Do they have to follow the food services establishment guidelines in terms of table separation, max of 10 per table? Are events in an auditorium allowed? If yes, what capacity would be allowed? What other restrictions would be required, such as spacing?

Per the NYSDOH school guidance document, for cafeterias, schools should require social distancing and if this is not feasible, allow students to eat in alternative areas and consider staggering schedules. There should be no sharing of food, no buffets, and schools/students must maintain social distancing requirements.

## **Frequently used COVID-19 Terms and their meanings:**

- **Social Distancing:** To practice social or physical distancing, stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from other people who are not from your household in both indoor and outdoor spaces. Social distancing should be practiced in combination with other everyday preventive actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19, including [wearing masks](#), avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands, and frequently washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Since people can spread the virus before they know they are sick, it is important to stay at least 6 feet away from others when possible, even if you—or they—do not have any symptoms.
- **Potential Exposure:** Being in the same household or having come into close contact with an individual who is confirmed or suspected to have a COVID-19 infection.

- **Close Contact:** Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 10-15 minutes, during the period starting 48 hours before symptoms appeared until the time the infected person is isolated.
- **Proximate Contact:** Being in the same enclosed environment such as a classroom, office or gathering, but greater than 6 feet from a person displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
- **Contact Tracing:** The identification and follow-up of individuals who may have encountered a person infected with COVID-19.
- **Case:** An individual with a lab-confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis. Cases are always issued an Isolation Order by SCPHS unless the individual has had a prior lab-confirmed case within the past 12 weeks and has completed the initial isolation.
- **Isolation:** The process of separating an individual who has a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 from others for 10 days or more following the onset of symptoms. SCPHS must issue a release from isolation before it can end.
- **Quarantine:** The process of separating an individual who has been in close (or in certain instances proximate) contact with someone who is positive from others. That way, if the individual develops COVID-19, the individual cannot spread it to others. If no symptoms develop, the quarantine period lasts for at least 14 days since the last contact between the two individuals. If symptoms develop during quarantine, SCPHS will provide additional instructions. SCPHS must issue a release from quarantine before it can end.
- **Positive Screen:** Screening for COVID-19 includes a series of questions to determine a person's risk for COVID-19. A positive screen means the individual is at risk for having a COVID-19 infection.
- **Antibodies:** Antibodies are proteins that can help protect an individual who had COVID-19 from getting it again. It is not yet known what level of antibodies results in immunity, or for precisely how long.
- **Rapid Antigen Test:** This type of test for COVID-19 infection provides results in under one hour. (These tests have a higher false negative rate than a PCR test but are appropriate in some situations. Please consult with your primary care physician.)
- **PCR Test:** This type of test detects whether an individual currently has COVID-19. Current evidence indicates a person may continue to test positive for several months after having COVID-19, though the individual is no longer ill or contagious.

## **Referenced/helpful Sites and Documents:**

NYSDOH guidance for in person instruction at Pre-K to Grade Schools During the COVID 10 Public Health Emergency Document

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

COVID posters and signage can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/print-resources.html?Sort=Date%3A%3Adesc>