



Westchester County School Reopening Workgroup

COVID - 19 Update

10/23/2020

In an effort to help all of us stay on top of issues as they arise, the Westchester County School Reopening Workgroup will, from time to time, offer updates on current issues relative to safely educating children and the health and safety of the entire school community.

Earlier today, we shared a memo from WCDOH Commission Sherlita Amler, addressing rapid COVID-19 testing. This update addresses other issues that have arisen in the last few days.

The new CDC guidance - Dated 10/21/2020 -- The CDC has issued new guidance regarding the time of “exposure” used to calculate a contact. Although it differs only slightly from current protocols, the Westchester County Department of Health is bound by the Governor’s Executive Orders to follow the NYS DOH guidance. Should the state make changes, we will work with the school districts to ensure that that they can be effectively implemented.

Winter athletics (including recreational athletics) -- The NYS DOH guidance identifies many sports and categorizes them as low, moderate and high risk. Unfortunately, many of the winter sports fall into the high risk category: Wrestling, ice hockey, basketball, martial arts, competitive cheer & group dance in particular. While the Executive Order bans such sports from competition until December 31st, it is unclear at this point what will be allowed in the New Year. ***Proceeding with scholastic sports will in all likelihood be a decision made by the state.***

For recreational sports, both the state and county are reviewing to what degree, if any, those activities are contributing to the rising COVID-19+ numbers.

Testing capability, capacity and the county’s role - With the apparent increase in cases as we move through the fall, as many have predicted, the county is working on building testing and contact tracing capacity.

Westchester County DOH has very limited capacity to provide testing. Testing is available through the state operated sites (1-888-364-3065) or through a physician or urgent care provider. Individuals with serious symptoms should consider contacting and going to the nearest emergency room.

Contact tracing and the county’s role - Westchester County partners with school districts in the reporting of known positive cases, and identifying individuals who may need to immediately quarantine as potentially exposed. This is different from the formal contact tracing process.

This has caused some confusion regarding exclusion of students and staff from school settings, such as:

- 1) Individuals identified as symptomatic and sent home but do not get tested for COVID-19;
- 2) Individuals identified and tested who do not get results within 48 hours, as per NYS DOH;
- 3) Individuals who are contacts to known positives but have not yet been contacted by “contact tracers”;
- 4) Individuals who are known contacts but have not received quarantine orders;
- 5) Individuals who are known to be COVID-19 positive but have yet to receive isolation orders.

Under Governor Cuomo’s Executive Order 202 and the various extensions, individuals who are deemed to be contacts must quarantine, and those who test positive must isolate. It is not necessary for an individual to be served with orders. Meeting the criteria of the state and county laws and orders is sufficient to trigger quarantine and isolation.

While Westchester County and NYS are doing everything in our power to ensure that individuals who are positive cases or known contacts are identified and directed into isolation or quarantine, it is clear that these individuals are to be excluded from school settings during the period of their isolation or quarantine. Those specifics are determined through the required cooperation schools must have with WCDOH.

Further, schools continue to have the authority to exclude individual students showing symptoms of communicable and/or infectious diseases of which SARS-COV-2 is one. This authority is found in NYS Education Law §906, as per the document shared earlier in the week.

We regularly add updated material to our website, <https://health.westchestergov.com/2019-novel-coronavirus>, and I can be reached with policy questions at jglazer@westchestergov.com