

To: Westchester County School Superintendents

From: Dr. Sherlita Amler, M.D., M.S. SA  
Commissioner of Health

Re: Revised quarantine guidelines and proximate contact guidelines

Date: January 3, 2021

I want to thank you for your incredible efforts and tireless work with implementing COVID-19 safety guidelines and for being our public health partners with contact tracing. After investigating many positive cases among students and staff that attend or work in Westchester County schools, the data indicates that the efforts you have made to reduce the risk of transmission in the schools are working. Given these factors, we are revising our definition of who should be placed under quarantine, contingent upon your ongoing implementation of your safety plans.

It has become increasingly clear that COVID-19 is spreading through gatherings outside of school – both large and small. Many of you have taken proactive actions and have excluded staff or students upon learning of gatherings in your district outside of school hours. We support and applaud those efforts.

We will continue to interview and isolate cases and quarantine close contacts and household members, and are requesting the following:

- Schools should continue to review the schedule of students and staff who have tested positive but only provide us with a list of those who were in close contact with the case during their infectious period (two days prior to symptom onset or two days prior to test date if asymptomatic), meaning persons that were within six feet for ten minutes or more cumulatively over a 24-hour period. It is still considered close contact if masks are worn and barriers are on desks.
- Your list should include persons who were indoors with the case in a regular sized classroom when masks were not worn for more than 10 minutes even if greater than 6 feet apart. This situation often occurs at lunch. We would consider those that are sitting at the same table and perimeter around as contacts and therefore would be subject to quarantine.
- If a school is unable to identify persons sitting within a 6 feet perimeter of a case on a bus, the entire bus would be subject to quarantine per the above definitions.
- A case without contacts in the school does not need to be reported to WCDH but still needs to be reported to the NYS School report card daily unless directed otherwise by NYSDOH.
- You no longer need to call us to report cases but instead should email information, using the attached Excel template that includes instructions, to: DOH-CovidReporting@westchestergov.com. This will allow contacts to be more quickly contacted.

If you feel that proximate contact is of concern (e.g., symptomatic student or staff have been onsite for several days), we will support those determinations and quarantine those who have been exposed.

We will continue to monitor cases in schools and reserve the right to modify the above perimeters should it become necessary to reduce COVID-19 transmission.

Westchester County has adopted the NYSDOH December 26<sup>th</sup> Health Advisory that requires contacts to only quarantine for **10 days** and to self-monitor symptoms for **days 11 – 14**. Contacts will be instructed to self-isolate should symptoms appear. NYSDOH is not allowing a 7-day test out option for ending quarantine.

While a vaccine is here, it is still important that we remain vigilant. In accordance with New York State Guidelines, and continue to keep the following practices in place:

- Social and physical distance is key – desks should ideally be at least six feet apart.
- Masks are essential. Mask breaks are allowable, but keep breaks to a minimum.
- Shields and barriers are a great tool, especially when eating.
- Ventilation is important. Keep doors and windows open or utilize a system with a MERV of 13

Thank you again for all you are doing to keep our County safe as we work to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our community.