

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



STEVEN BELLONE
SUFFOLK COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

GREGSON H. PIGOTT, MD, MPH
Commissioner

November 10, 2020

Dear Superintendent,

I am writing with another update in the ever-evolving COVID-19 response in Suffolk County. After investigating approximately 900 positive cases associated with over 300 distinct schools, the data indicates the efforts you have made to reduce the risk of transmission in the school setting are working. As we enter the winter months and the cold and flu season, it is more important than ever to remain vigilant. In accordance with New York State Guidelines, I continue to strongly encourage you 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 or greater.

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 are concerned about the potential impact the holidays will have in our communities. We encourage you to work with your school community to promote holiday celebrations with household members only. Those students and staff who travel for the holidays should abide by the New York State travel restrictions and not attend school until cleared via testing after three days of quarantine, or by quarantining for fourteen days upon return.

Because of the success our schools have had implementing their reopening plans and minimizing risk within their buildings, we will not be investigating each school case as thoroughly as we have been since the beginning of the school year. It is time to redirect our efforts on investigating the spread of COVID-19 in the community. We will continue to interview and isolate cases and quarantine close contacts and household members. We ask that schools review the schedule of students and staff who have tested positive and provide us with contact lists for those who were in close contact with the case during their infectious period (48 hours prior to symptom onset or 48 hours prior to test date if asymptomatic). We will review and enter those contacts into the system for interviews and monitoring. Remember, close contact is defined as within six feet for ten minutes or more over a 24-hour period. It is still considered close contact if masks are worn and barriers are on desks. As long as you continue to implement the practices listed above, we no longer think it is necessary to quarantine proximate contacts. However, 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 remain available to provide guidance and support as needed.



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Below is a summary of the process moving forward:

- Continue to submit case alerts through the portal:
<https://suffolkcountyny.force.com/public/request/DOHSCVSCL/details>
- Do not need to submit classroom details of the case
- Submit contact lists using the current contact list template to schoolcovid.alert@suffolkcountyny.gov.
Include name of case, date of birth, and name of school in the email.

If you require assistance or guidance, please note that request in the portal when you make a submission. Otherwise, you can call 311 and ask to speak to the Communicable Disease Unit for assistance in contact tracing.

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.

Sincerely,



Gregson H. Pigott, MD, MPH
Commissioner