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The Sullivan County Public Health Department (SCPHS) concurs with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the [American Academy of Pediatrics guidance](#) for universal mask wearing in schools. SCPHS also recommends that school districts follow the [CDC guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#), updated on August 5, 2021.

### ***Key Takeaways***

- Students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction in the fall 2021 is a priority.
- Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
- Due to the circulating and highly contagious Delta variant, CDC recommends universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.
- In addition to universal indoor masking, CDC recommends schools maintain at least 3 feet of physical distance between students within classrooms to reduce transmission risk. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least 3 feet, such as when schools cannot fully re-open while maintaining these distances, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as screening testing.
- Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection are also important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.
- Students, teachers, and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care.
- Many schools serve children under the age of 12 who are not eligible for vaccination at this time. Therefore, this guidance emphasizes implementing layered prevention strategies (e.g., using multiple prevention strategies together consistently) to protect students, teachers, staff, visitors, and other members of their households and support in-person learning.

- **Localities should monitor community transmission, vaccination coverage, screening testing, and occurrence of outbreaks to guide decisions on the level of layered prevention strategies (e.g., physical distancing, screening testing).**
- CDC Changes as of Aug. 4, 2021:
  - Updated to recommend universal indoor masking for all students, staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.
  - Added recommendation for fully vaccinated people who have a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 to be tested 3-5 days after exposure, regardless of whether they have symptoms.

## **MASKS**

Mask guidance remains unchanged from the end of the prior school year in June 2021 consistent with CDC recommendations. Per existing CDC guidance, all students, staff and visitors must wear masks indoors regardless of vaccination status. Mask wearing is not required outdoors.

## **PHYSICAL DISTANCING**

Maintain at least three feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, physical education, and music. If students are engaged in singing or playing a wind instrument, at least six feet of distance between students is recommended. In physical education, ensure any contact due to activities is quick and not for extended periods of time. Follow proper hand hygiene and infection control recommendations.

When outdoors, schools should encourage activities that allow for distancing and reduced contact.

## **CONTACT TRACING AND QUARANTINE**

School districts must continue to report positive cases of COVID-19 to SCPHS. All individuals who test positive for COVID-19 must remain in isolation for 10 days from the date of symptom onset or test date if asymptomatic.

Consistent with CDC guidance, students in the K-12 indoor classroom who are within at least three feet of an infected student with masking are excluded from the definition of close contact and not required to quarantine. SCPHS concurs with CDC guidance which recommends that fully vaccinated persons who have come into close contact with someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be tested 3-5 days after exposure and remain in quarantine until the test result is confirmed.

Close contacts of positive cases of COVID-19 which do not fall in the exception detailed below must quarantine for 10 days and monitor symptoms through the 14<sup>th</sup> day.

Below is the CDC exemption for K-12 students in indoor classroom settings:

Exception: In the K-12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition **excludes students who were at least >3 feet away from an infected student** (laboratory confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) if both students correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time other K-12 prevention strategies were in place.

*This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.*

It is recommended that schools continue to contact trace and notify families of potential exposure so they may monitor for symptoms closely 14 days from the date of last exposure. Any students who begin to exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 should remain home and seek testing.

SCPHS recommends for any activities not in the classroom – recess, lunch, support services, etc. – schools keep records of seating charts and cohort students as much as possible to reduce exposure and assist with contact tracing.

### **SCHOOL DISTRICT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

School districts must continue to report positive cases to SCPHS. Only those required to quarantine must be reported. Those exempt from the definition of close contact (as described above and in the CDC guidance) should be informed of exposure and should be monitored closely for symptoms for 14 days from date of last exposure.

### **VACCINATIONS**

No SCPHS requirement for vaccination although strongly recommended. Vaccination requirements for staff may be decided by the individual school districts. Please send an estimate of your staff/student population that are fully vaccinated. Rough estimates are acceptable. Please email estimates to [nancy.mcgraw@sullivanny.us](mailto:nancy.mcgraw@sullivanny.us) and copy our epidemiologist, [Haley.lankau@sullivanny.us](mailto:Haley.lankau@sullivanny.us).

SCPHS has been holding weekly clinics at our clinic at 50 Community Lane in Liberty on Wednesdays from 2-6pm and will continue to do so until further notice. Please also refer parents to the flyer of area providers and pharmacies where a vaccine can be obtained, all free of charge.

### **TESTING**

At this time, periodic COVID-19 testing is not required by SCPHS. SCPHS will monitor community transmission and revisit if warranted. Screening testing is a prevention strategy recommended by CDC. Review CDC guidance for more information about screening testing and other prevention strategies.

### **TESTING RESOURCES**

SCPHS has accepted State/Federal funding to aid school in the establishment of COVID-19 screening testing programs to support and maintain in-person learning. SCPHS will issue a list of approved vendors schools may work with to conduct screening testing. SCPHS is also exploring entering into vendor contracts for screening testing for schools. This program is dependent on available funding. Contact me for more information in the coming weeks.

### **BUSES**

SCPHS concurs with existing CDC guidance that all students and adults must wear well-fitting masks while inside a bus, regardless of vaccination status.

At least three feet of physical distancing between non-household members should be maintained as much as possible on a school bus. Ventilation, loading from the rear forward, and alternate window/aisle seating can also help reduce risk of transmission.

### **[Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools](#)**

Please note the above guidance is provided on an advisory basis only.

As a reminder, also attached and sent with this document is a letter sent to schools in the Spring of 2021 regarding COVID-19 which has been updated with some additional information. Attached is also a mask flyer to promote mask wearing for back-to-school, and a flyer with a comprehensive list of healthcare providers who offer COVID-19 in Sullivan County.

Sincerely,

*Nancy McGraw*

Nancy McGraw, MPH, MBA, LCSW  
Public Health Director

Encl: Measures of Success letter  
Back to school mask flyer  
List of providers flyer