

LEGAL SERVICES ADVISORY

Summary of Recent Changes to NJ Department of Health's K-12 Guidance

The DOH's most recent update to its guidance piece may be found here: https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/RecommendationsForLocalHealthDepts_K12Schools.pdf

COVID-19 Regional Risk Matrix

The DOH has been posting weekly COVID-19 activity reports here: <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/statistics/covid/>. These reports color code each region according to several data markers tracking COVID-19 cases in the region. These color codes correspond with the DOH's Regional Risk Matrix. If a region is coded red, the DOH recommends that the school district fully implement remote learning. It does not, in our opinion, recommend districts in red zones continue to be open

to in-person learning; however, it does leave the decision to local school districts and permit them to remain physically open if they are in red zones, in which case they should follow the recommendations contained in the guidance for orange zones. Prior to this update, the DOH indicated that red zones must implement full remote learning. Now, it recommends full remote learning if the region is in the red zone.

Close Contacts

Exclusion of close contacts

The DOH has revised the number of days close contacts should be excluded from school grounds. If a district is in a yellow or green zone, exposed close contacts should be physically excluded from school for 10 days, or alternatively, for 7 days if a negative test result is collected at 5-7 days from exposure. If the district is in an orange zone (or red zone but remaining open in person), close contacts should be excluded from school grounds for 14 days.

Schools serving medically complex or other high-risk individuals should use a 14-day exclusion period for the exclusion of these individuals or those who work closely with them when identified as close contacts throughout all risk levels.

Masks

The guidance was updated to reflect that the use of masks and/or barriers do not preclude an individual from being identified as a close contact to a positive COVID-19 case.

Symptomatic individuals in student or staff member's household

This update clarifies that if a student or staff member shares a household with an individual that has COVID-19 symptoms, that student or staff member should be excluded from school until the symptomatic individual in their household receives a negative test result. If they test positive, the student or staff member

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should continue to quarantine as directed by the chart on page 14 of the guidance.

Contact tracing responsibilities

The DOH has clarified that the school staff should identify close contacts of positive COVID-19 cases in the school. Previously, the DOH said the Districts should work with the local health department and staff to identify close contacts. The guidance remains clear

that once close contacts are identified by school staff, the local health department is the one with the responsibility to notify and interview those close contacts.

Outbreaks

The DOH has specified that two or more cases must be laboratory confirmed by RT-PCR or antigen tests to be considered a school outbreak. The type of test was previously not identified.

Youth sports

The DOH update incorporates additional Executive Orders issued pertaining to youth sports, EO 149 and EO 204. As of January 2, 2021, most youth sports were restarted, albeit with limits on indoor and outdoor gatherings, a prohibition of interstate competitions,

and a continued delay in the hockey season. For details, visit here: <https://covid19.nj.gov/faqs/nj-information/reopening-guidance-and-restrictions/can-organized-sports-resume-what-are-the-safety-requirements-for-sports-facilities>

Screening template

The DOH updated its template COVID-19 screening form to include questions relating to travel outside of NY, PA, CT and DE, indicating that in this case, the district should rely on the exclusion criteria for quarantining.