

Greater Southern Tier BOCES
2021-2022 COVID-19 Response Plan

Effective September 2, 2021

This COVID-19 Response Plan will provide direction to BOCES' instructional and non-instructional programs until June 30, 2022. The BOCES will follow its 2021-2022 Regional School Calendar by providing full-time in-person instruction to its students. As detailed below, New York State, the local health department(s) or the District Superintendent may suspend in-person instruction as outlined in the section of this Plan entitled "Monitoring cases and making decisions about in-person instruction." If such in-person instruction is suspended, the BOCES will provide remote instruction to students during any such closures.

Prevention Strategies to Reduce Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in Schools

Regardless of the level of community transmission, it is critical that schools use and layer prevention strategies. Six key prevention strategies are essential to safe delivery of in-person instruction and help to prevent COVID-19 transmission in schools:

1. Appropriate use of masks
2. Physical or social distancing
3. Handwashing and respiratory hygiene
4. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities
5. Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine
6. Vaccination and testing

All prevention strategies provide some level of protection, and layered strategies implemented at the same time provide the greatest level of protection.

Appropriate use of masks

The following rules regarding the use of face coverings apply to students, instructional staff and non-instructional staff as noted below:

- Universal masking of teachers, staff, students, and visitors to P-12 schools over age two and able to medically tolerate a face covering/mask and regardless of vaccination status, is required until New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) modifies or rescinds its masking regulation. The BOCES will comply with all subsequent and/or successor NYSDOH masking requirements. Such requirement is subject to the following CDC-recommended exceptions for the following categories of people:
 - A person who cannot wear a mask, or cannot safely wear a mask, because of a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
 - A person for whom wearing a mask would create a risk to workplace health, safety, or job duty as determined by the relevant workplace safety guidelines or federal regulations.
- Masks are required for school events and athletics while indoors.
- Masks are not required while eating, drinking, singing or playing a wind instrument.
- Students and instructional staff are not required to wear a face covering when outdoors.

- Students will be permitted to take mask breaks in the discretion of faculty or administration.
- Face coverings must be worn during transportation by students and employees.
- Face coverings are not required for employees who are outside of the presence of students so long as the individuals do not come within six feet of another person. Employees must wear face coverings in common areas such as lobbies and when traveling around their workplace.

Acceptable face coverings:

- Acceptable face coverings for COVID-19 include but are not limited to cloth-based 2-ply face coverings and disposable masks that securely cover both the mouth and nose (bandanas, buffs and face shields are not acceptable face coverings).
- However, cloth, disposable, or other homemade face coverings are not acceptable face coverings for workplace activities that typically require a higher degree of protection for personal protective equipment (PPE) due to the nature of the work. For those activities, N95 respirators or other PPE used under existing industry standards should continue to be used, as is defined in accordance with OSHA guidelines.

Physical or social distancing

The following rules will apply to BOCES' instructional programs:

- Between students in classrooms: students should be at least 3 feet, combined with indoor masking, including during athletics and music classes.
- Maximize physical distance when students are moving through the food service line and while eating indoors or allow students to eat meals in classrooms.
- Maintain 6 feet of distance:
 - Between adults and students at all times indoors.
 - In common areas such as lobbies and auditoriums.
- Remove nonessential furniture and make other changes to classroom layouts to maximize distance between students.
- Face desks in the same direction, where possible.
- Maximize the use of virtual meetings, as appropriate, among employees.
- Visitors: Limit any nonessential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations as much as possible—especially with people who are not from the local geographic area (for example, not from the same community, town, city, county). Require all visitors to wear masks and physically distance from others. “Essential” visitors will include scheduled customer work for Career and Technical Education.

Transportation: Create distance between children on school buses (for example, seat children one child per row, skip rows), when possible. Masks are required by federal order on school buses and other forms of public transportation in the United States. Open windows to improve ventilation when it does not create a safety hazard.

Non-instructional employees and programs: The following rules will apply to employees who are engaged in office-based work outside of buildings used for educational purposes or in parts of buildings that are not designated for educational purposes:

- The BOCES will ensure that a distance of at least six feet is maintained among individuals at all times, unless safety or the core activity requires a shorter distance.
- Any time individuals come within six feet of another person, acceptable face coverings must be worn. Individuals must be prepared to don a face covering if another person unexpectedly comes within six feet.

Handwashing and respiratory hygiene

Handwashing and respiratory hygiene in instructional programs: Through ongoing health education units and lessons, instructional staff must teach children proper handwashing and reinforce behaviors and provide adequate supplies. The BOCES will ensure that teachers and staff use proper handwashing and respiratory hygiene:

- Teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and increase monitoring to ensure adherence among students, teachers, and staff. If handwashing is not possible, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol should be used.
- Encourage students and staff to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue when not wearing a mask and immediately wash their hands after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Some students with disabilities might need assistance with handwashing and respiratory etiquette behaviors.
- Adequate supplies: The BOCES will support healthy hygiene behaviors by providing adequate supplies, including soap, a way to dry hands, tissues, face masks (as required), and no-touch/foot-pedal trash cans. If soap and water are not readily available, programs may provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol (for staff and older children who can safely use hand sanitizer).

Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities

The following rules apply to BOCES facilities:

- Ventilation: Improve ventilation to the extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air, increase the delivery of clean air, and dilute potential contaminants. This can be achieved through the following actions:
 - Bring in as much outdoor air as possible.
 - Ensure Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) settings are maximizing ventilation.
 - Filter and/or clean the air by improving the level of filtration as much as possible.
 - Use exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens.
 - Open windows in buses and other transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk. Even just cracking windows open a few inches improves air circulation.
- Modified layouts: Adjust physical layouts in classrooms and other settings to maximize physical space, such as by turning desks to face in the same direction.
- Cleaning: Regularly clean high touch surfaces and objects (for example, playground equipment, door handles, sink handles, toilets, drinking fountains) within the school and on school buses at least daily or between use as much as possible.
- Communal spaces: Close communal use of shared spaces, such as cafeterias, if possible; otherwise, stagger use and clean regularly (for example, daily or as often as needed). Consider use of larger spaces such as cafeterias, libraries, gyms for academic instruction, to maximize physical distancing.

- Water systems: Take steps to ensure that all water systems and features (for example, sink faucets, decorative fountains) are safe to use after a prolonged facility shutdown.

Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine

The BOCES will collaborate with local health departments, to the extent allowable by privacy laws and other applicable laws, to confidentially provide information about people diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19. Students, teachers, and staff with positive test results must isolate, and close contacts to individuals with positive test results must quarantine, where required. The BOCES will report positive cases to the appropriate local health department as soon as it is informed of such cases. School officials should notify families of close contacts as soon as possible after they are notified that someone in the school has tested positive (within the same school day).

- Staying home when appropriate: The BOCES will educate teachers, staff and families about when they and their children should stay home and when they can return to school. Students, teachers, and staff who have symptoms must stay home and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care. Alternatively, symptomatic students (with a parent's or guardian's written consent) and staff may be tested and remain at school if they test negative for COVID-19.
- Isolation will be used to separate people diagnosed with COVID-19 from those who are not infected, as required by state or local health departments.
- Case investigation and contact tracing: The BOCES will work with local health departments to facilitate, to the extent allowable by applicable laws, systematic case investigation and contact tracing of infected students, teachers, and staff, and consistent isolation of cases and quarantine of close contacts.
- Quarantine will be used for students, teachers, and staff who might have been exposed to COVID-19, as required by state or local health departments. Close contacts, identified through contact tracing, may be required to quarantine by state or local health departments. Students, teachers, and staff who are in quarantine must stay home and follow the direction of the local public health department about when it is safe for them to be around others.

Monitoring cases and making decisions about in-person instruction

The BOCES will closely and regularly monitor the numbers of students, teachers, and staff with COVID-19. In collaboration with the local health department, the BOCES will make decisions to continue or discontinue in-person instruction based on information about levels of community transmission with school-specific factors, such as implementation of prevention strategies and the number of cases among students, teachers, and staff.

Interventions to control clusters

A school cluster is an index case and two or more cases epidemiologically linked to the index case who likely acquired SARS-CoV-2 infection in school (i.e., school-associated cases). When cases are introduced into the school environment, they can lead to clusters and potentially to rapid and uncontrolled spread. This is more likely to happen in areas of substantial or high community transmission, as cases are more likely to be introduced into the school from the community. The BOCES will monitor cases (consistent with privacy and other applicable laws), identify clusters quickly, and promptly intervene to control spread. Infection source and whether the infection is likely acquired in school or outside of school

should be determined by case investigations conducted by a collaboration between BOCES administration and the local health department.

The BOCES will take the following actions to control transmission in the event of a cluster:

1. Investigate cases and trace contacts; require isolation and quarantine as required by state or local health departments (consistent with applicable privacy and other laws).
 - Work with the health department to carefully investigate each case, including conducting interviews with students, teachers, parents, and school staff.
 - Encourage compliance with isolation for people who test positive.
 - Work with the health department to trace close contacts in accordance with applicable federal and state privacy laws of all cases and refer close contacts for diagnostic testing.
2. Assess situations where close contacts occurred in instructional programs and implement interventions to address potential contributors to the clusters. For example:
 - Determine whether inconsistent or incorrect use of masks contributed to the clusters and intervene to improve consistent and correct mask use.
 - Assess implementation of physical distancing and determine whether intervention is needed to address distancing.
 - Eliminate or decrease nonessential in-person interactions among teachers and staff during meetings, lunches, and other situations that may have led to adult-to-adult transmission.

Providing options for teachers and school staff

At all levels of community transmission, the BOCES may provide reassignment, remote work, or other options for teachers and staff who have documented high-risk conditions that place them at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 to limit the risk of workplace exposure. When these conditions are disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the BOCES will ensure compliance with law and may need to consider providing reasonable accommodation subject to undue hardship. Options for reassignment may include but are not limited to telework, virtual teaching opportunities, modified job responsibilities, environmental modifications, scheduling flexibility, or temporary reassignment to different job responsibilities.

Additional COVID-19 Prevention Strategies in Instructional Programs

The presence of any of the symptoms below generally suggests a student, teacher, or staff member has an infectious illness and should not attend school or work, regardless of whether the illness is COVID-19. For students, staff, and teachers with chronic conditions, symptom presence should represent a change from their typical health status to warrant exclusion from school or work. Occurrence of any of the symptoms below while a student, teacher, or staff member is at school indicates that the person should be referred for diagnostic testing:

- Fever (external temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher) or chills
- Cough (for students or employees with chronic cough due to allergies or asthma, a change in their cough from baseline)
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing (for students or employees with asthma, a change from their baseline breathing)
- Fatigue

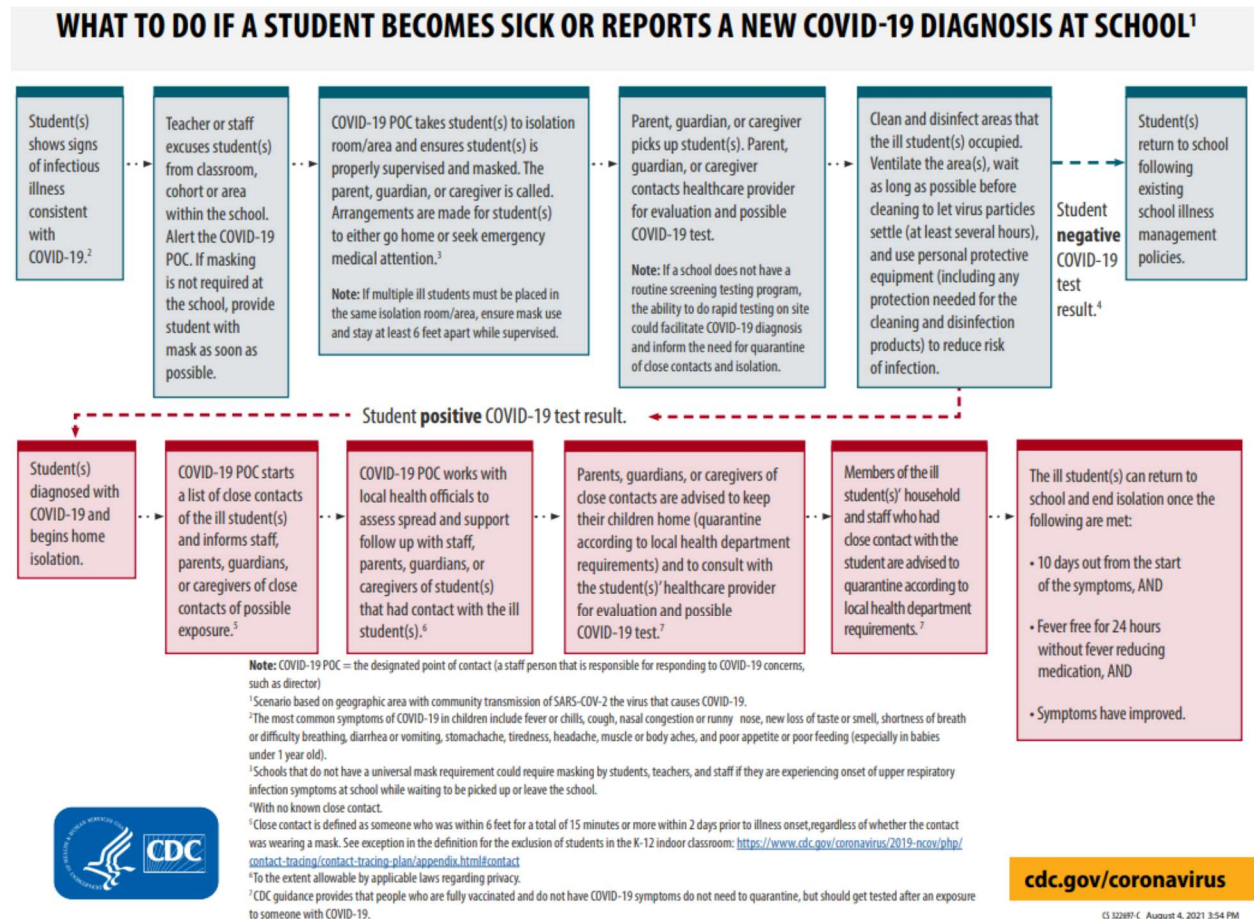
- Muscle or body aches
- New onset of severe headache, especially with a fever
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Students should not attend school in-person if they or their caregiver identifies new development of any of the symptoms above.

Students with COVID-19 symptoms or suspected or confirmed COVID-19 diagnoses will be placed in isolation room/areas until transportation can be arranged to send them home or seek emergency medical attention. Alternatively, symptomatic students (with a parent’s or guardian’s written consent) may be tested and remain at school if they test negative for COVID-19.

If a COVID-19 diagnosis is confirmed, the BOCES will support public health officials by identifying close contacts in the school setting.

The BOCES will follow the flowchart below if a student becomes sick or reports a new COVID-19 diagnosis at school:



cdc.gov/coronavirus

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Symptomatic students and employees who are not tested will be treated as a positive case.

Vaccination and testing

COVID-19 vaccination among all eligible students as well as teachers, staff, and household members is the most critical strategy to help schools safely resume full operations.

Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. People who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are at low risk of symptomatic or severe infection. A growing body of evidence suggests that people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are less likely to become infected and develop symptoms and are at substantially reduced risk from severe illness and death from COVID-19 compared with unvaccinated people.

The BOCES will comply with any New York State mandate to vaccinate employees or test unvaccinated employees for COVID-19.