

NJEA LEGAL SERVICES

Notice of NJ Department of Health Guidance for Local Health Departments to Use with K-12 Schools

On August 13, 2020, the New Jersey Department of Health (DOH) issued a guidance document to be used by local health departments working with K-12 schools. This advisory is intended to summarize some of the major points of that guidance, but is by no means all inclusive. DOH's guidance memo, which contains specific and useful information, is available here: <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/RecommendationsForLocalHealthDeptsK12Schools.pdf>

REGIONAL COVID-19 RISKS

The DOH published on page 3 of their document a COVID-19 Regional Risk Matrix that sets certain standards for school districts based upon whether their region of the state is considered **low risk**, **moderate risk**, **high risk**, and **very high risk**. The regions are broken down by county, as listed below. The matrix sets forth guidance on implementing remote learning, responses to positive tests in the school, and limiting activities depending on the regional risk level.

Regions:

Northwest: Morris, Passaic, Sussex, Warren
Northeast: Bergen, Essex, Hudson
Central West: Hunterdon, Mercer, Somerset
Central East: Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Union
Southwest: Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Salem
Southeast: Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland

The DOH uses these same regional ratings of **low risk**, **moderate risk**, **high risk**, and **very high risk** in a COVID-19 Exclusion Table on page 13 of their document which sets standards for when students and staff should be excluded from school grounds under different circumstances.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

On page 15 of their document, the DOH includes a table of possible scenarios in terms of positive tests, school and community outbreaks, and when school closures should be considered and for how long. The DOH is careful to note that while this table should be used as a tool, school closure is a local decision that should be made by school administrators in consultation with local public health departments.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING

The DOH sets forth standards for both routine, daily cleaning and disinfecting using EPA-registered products for use against SARS-CoV-2 of high touch surfaces and objects, as well as standards for cordoning off, ventilating, waiting, and cleaning and disinfecting areas used by a COVID-19 positive person if that person is in school the day school officials are notified of the positive status. If there is an ill person at school, the school should:

- Immediately close off areas used by the person who is sick, open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area and wait 24 hours before you clean or disinfect.
- Clean and disinfect all areas used by the person who is sick as outlined in cleaning and disinfection section, including the isolation area. Once area has been appropriately disinfected, it can be opened for use.
- If the number of ill students exceeds the number of isolation areas and the areas cannot be closed for 24 hours, clean and disinfect between ill persons.
- Notify the school community as per school protocol.

SCREENING

The DOH recommends that schools have a policy for daily symptom screening for both students and staff. They include in Appendix 1 of their document a template for daily screening of students and staff.

STAY HOME WHEN SICK OR IF EXPOSED

The DOH states that students and staff should stay home from school if they have:

- A positive test result
- COVID-19 symptoms (symptoms are outlined in page 9-10 of the document)
- Have potentially been exposed through:
 - Close contact (within 6 feet for at least 10 minutes) with a person with COVID-19 in the past 14 days;
 - Travelled to a state on the NJ travel advisory list; or
 - Travelled to a country on the CDC international travel advisory list.

ISOLATING WHILE AT SCHOOL

The DOH states that anyone with COVID-19 symptoms at school must be isolated and wear a face covering (unless under 2 or unable due to illness) until sent home, maintaining social distancing at all times. Schools should ask the individual about potential exposure to COVID-19 in the prior 14 days including:

- If the ill person was in close contact (within 6 feet for at least 10 minutes) with someone with confirmed COVID-19; and

- Whether they travelled to an area with a high rate of COVID-19 transmission (either another state on NJ's travel advisory or a country on the CDC's travel precaution list).

Individuals should be sent home and referred to a healthcare provider for evaluation on whether testing is needed. Testing for COVID-19 is recommended for persons with COVID-19 symptoms.

NOTIFICATION

The DOH states that schools should notify local health departments when students or staff are ill and have potential COVID-19 exposure, are ill when COVID-19 risk level is **high**, or when they see an increase in the number of persons with compatible symptoms. Schools should be prepared to provide the following information when consulting with the local health department:

- Contact information for the ill person;
- The date the ill person developed symptoms, tested positive for COVID-19 (if known), and was last in the building;
- Types of interactions (close contacts, length of contact) the person may have had with other persons in the building or in other locations;
- Names, addresses, and telephone numbers for ill person's close contacts in the school; and
- Any other information to assist with the determination of next steps.

The DOH provides template letters for districts to notify parents and guardians that there has been a positive case in the school and to notify them if their child has been in close contact with a person with a confirmed positive case (which requires the student to stay home from school for 14 days from their date of last exposure).

OTHER TOPICS

The DOH guidance also addresses topics such as best hygiene practices, face coverings, social distancing, school sports, choir and music activities, handling individuals with symptoms similar to COVID-19, testing, and all the topics touched on above in more detail.