

FALL 2021 COVID-19 BACK TO SCHOOL BASICS

FROM THE DESK OF CHRISTINE SCHUYLER
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The Chautauqua County Department of Health strives to help ensure that schools open and operate with the health and safety of students, teachers, school staff, their families and the community as the priority. Mutual goals are limiting the spread of COVID-19, keeping children healthy, and keeping them physically in school to get the education they deserve. Further guidance will be sent to you as it is developed and we hope these basics are helpful as we work together to meet those goals!

The Delta variant of the coronavirus is forcing renewed public health measures because it is VERY contagious and spreads more easily than the original strain of the coronavirus. People, including children, who get infected with the Delta variant are more likely to get seriously ill and need hospitalized than those infected with earlier strains of the virus.

COVID-19 Vaccination

The current COVID-19 vaccines are safe and are effective, even against the Delta variant. COVID-19 vaccination is the best way to protect our children from dangerous variants and from needing hospitalization or having long-lasting COVID-19 symptoms. Medical science has long proven that other vaccines keep dangerous diseases and viruses away from our children and the COVID-19 vaccine is no different.

Masking

- **In accordance with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the New York State Department of Health, the Chautauqua County Health Department strongly recommends that all schools require universal indoor masking for all students, staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.**
- School buses operated by public and private school systems fall under the CDC's transportation order and as such, passengers and drivers must wear a mask on school buses at all times, regardless of vaccination status, subject to the exclusions and exemptions in the CDC's Order.
- Outdoors: In general, people do not need to wear masks when outdoors. CDC recommends that people who are not fully vaccinated wear a mask in crowded outdoor settings or during activities that involve sustained close contact with other people.
- Exceptions to indoor and outdoor masking can be made 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) (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.)
- 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.
- Schools will have masks available to students who need them.
- Scientists have proven that properly wearing a mask does help stop the spread of COVID-19 because it is spread from person to person by respiratory droplets. A layered prevention approach is best to prevent the spread of disease: vaccination, frequent hand-washing, wearing a mask, and keeping distance between people.

Identification of Close Contacts of Someone who tests Positive for COVID-19

- Outside of the classroom, close contacts are individuals who are within 6 feet of an infected person, without masks for 10 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.
- **If universal masking is used in indoor K-12 classrooms, students who are exposed to an infected person are exempted from quarantine:**
 - Students who are at least 3 feet away from an infected person are not considered close contacts and do not need to quarantine as long as both the infected student and the exposed student are correctly and consistently wearing masks the entire time.
 - This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting.
- Individuals who are fully vaccinated or who have had a COVID-19 infection within the last 90 days also do not need to quarantine if they are identified as a close contact.

Daily Screenings

Schools are no longer required to document or conduct daily temperature checks and wellness screenings. Please continue to screen your children for symptoms of illness before sending them to school and keep them home if they are ill. If a student develops symptoms during the school day, the child should be evaluated by the school nurse and sent home if necessary.