



Clinton County Health Department

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“Working Together for a Healthier Community”

www.clintonhealth.org



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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News Release

Date: September 4, 2020
For Immediate Release
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Re-opening of Schools in the North Country

Plattsburgh, September 4, 2020. As the beginning of the new school year approaches, anxiety about the re-opening of schools is evident and expected. While active cases of COVID-19 have remained relatively low in Clinton County throughout the phased reopening, many residents have expressed concerns about potential outbreaks in schools when in-person education resumes. As of 8:00 am Friday, September 4, there were three active cases of COVID-19 in Clinton County. However, as recent outbreaks in neighboring counties and across the country have shown, the risk for increased cases of illness persists.

“Re-opening schools and universities is critical for the educational and social development of students of all ages. It is also necessary to re-open these institutions for many parents who need to return to work. At the same time, we want to ensure that schools open in a manner that prioritizes the health and safety of students, teachers, school staff, their families, and the community at large. *These are not mutually exclusive goals,*” stated John Kanoza, Director of Public Health in Clinton County. “Our goal is to reduce, to the greatest extent possible, transmission of disease to students, teachers, and staff in the school setting which will help prevent infection in the wider community. This means taking steps to mitigate spread once in-person learning is reinstated.”

Local colleges and school districts have done extensive work and planning to ensure the safest possible return for students and staff. Schools and universities have systems in place to ensure that mask-wearing, hand washing, physical distancing, and sanitation guidelines are consistently followed by staff, students, and their families on school grounds. While oversight of schools and approval of re-opening plans occur at the state-level, local health officials have been in close communications with both Champlain Valley Educational Services (CVES) and individual school districts, providing guidance where appropriate to ensure as safe of a re-opening as possible.

“One of the strongest assets to our county is the collaboration that occurs within our community,” noted Mr. Kanoza. “Our Clinton County Incident Management Team--comprised of representatives from CCHD, Clinton County Sheriff’s Office, Clinton County Office of Emergency Services, and county and local elected officials—communicates regularly with other key community partners, such as CVES, individual school districts, SUNY Plattsburgh, Clinton Community College, and New York State representatives. Should a positive case of COVID-19 occur within a school, we will use the established local system for contact tracing that has been successful in mitigating risk and controlling spread of the virus in our community for many months now.”

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“Persons who have any physical mobility or other needs, call the telephone number above to arrange for accommodations”

Contact tracing, the practice of informing people when they've been exposed to a contagious disease, is essential to slowing the spread of COVID-19. Students or staff members who have been deemed close contacts of a lab-confirmed positive case will be contacted by the local health department and will undergo precautionary or mandatory quarantine protocols.

“The most effective way to keep our community safe is to continue the practices we have been emphasizing from the start. Maintaining a 6 foot separation from others, wearing face coverings, avoiding gatherings, washing hands often, and frequently disinfecting commonly touched surfaces can help stop the spread of this virus in our community,” added Mr. Kanoza.

For tips on preparing students to return to school, visit <https://bit.ly/2DrpSmj> and <https://bit.ly/2Z2wP4K>.

About the Clinton County Health Department:

The Health Department is an accredited full service department serving the residents of Clinton County. The Health Department's Mission is to improve and protect the health, well-being and environment of the people of Clinton County. Visit our website at www.clintonhealth.org or connect with us on Facebook (@clintonhealth), Twitter (@ClintonCountyHD), and Instagram (clintoncountyhealth).

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