



## **Contact Tracing and Exclusion from the School Environment vs. Quarantine vs. Isolation**

### **Why is contact tracing such a complex, often confusing issue?**

Contact tracing, which seeks to determine who was a direct contact of someone with COVID-19, can be confusing for school administrators, medical personnel, and parents alike. Typically, exceptions and scenarios may apply. Contact tracing parameters have been established by the New York State Department of Health and are regulated by local counties' Departments of Health.

The basic metric is that 6 feet is considered the "golden rule" of safety, and therefore, is recognized as the standard for "social distancing." This rule applies to all situations, whether individuals are or are not appropriately face-masked or vaccinated against COVID-19. Those at medical risk, such as unvaccinated individuals or those with underlying health conditions, should practice social distancing as much as possible in public spaces, whether it be in school, a supermarket or elsewhere. In addition, health experts strongly advocate that vaccinated individuals observe social distancing protocols and face mask usage when in certain public venues due to highly infectious variants of COVID-19, such as the Delta strain.

### **Contact Tracing Within Schools**

The New York State Department of Health issued a statement on Aug. 2, 2021 requiring universal mask usage for students and staff. The department also updated its guidance for students regarding determining who would be a direct contact of COVID-19. It stipulated that a student must be within 3 feet of an infectious student in the classroom setting for 15 or more cumulative minutes. This guidance does not apply to adult staff or students in non-classroom spaces, such as a bus, where anyone within a 6-foot radius of an infectious individual for 15 cumulative minutes is deemed a direct contact. In both scenarios, the "close contact" individuals meet the City School District of New Rochelle's requirement to be excluded from the school environment/setting. They also meet the Westchester County Department of Health's requirement to quarantine for 10 days if not vaccinated against COVID-19.

Band, orchestra, and chorus venues must observe specific safety parameters. Singing or playing a wind instrument require 6-foot distancing, whereas playing a string instrument while wearing a face mask requires 3-foot distancing. Outdoor physical activities are given latitude; a face mask is not required.

This is because the potential to contract COVID-19 is minimal to non-existent in that setting, unless individuals are in close spaces. Indoor physical activities require face mask usage, modified activities, and social distancing where possible.

### **Information About Quarantines**

This section provides a broad-stroke explanation of what contact tracers must consider when deciding who might require being placed in quarantine by the Westchester County Department of Health.

The City School District of New Rochelle works in consultation with the Westchester County Department of Health regarding all COVID-19-related matters. The school district and its schools are not authorized to declare a quarantine. The District is authorized to remove students from the school environment for the purposes of maintaining a safe and healthy environment. Only the Westchester County Department of Health can declare a quarantine status.

Once an individual has been identified as a direct contact of an individual with COVID-19, the quarantine period to remain out of school or work is 10 days. The only exception is if the individual has had a documented COVID-19 infection in the past 90 days where natural immunity still exists, or vaccination status against COVID-19 can be proven.

Within a household, if a family member is deemed a direct contact and remains asymptomatic, only that individual needs to quarantine. Other family members are considered "contacts of contacts" and do not need to quarantine. However, once that individual becomes symptomatic and tests positive for COVID-19 with PCR testing, all family members within the household must remain in quarantine for a minimum of 10 days from the onset of symptom development.

### **Exclusion, Quarantine, Isolation**

Contact tracing will prompt exclusion from the school environment by the school district, and potentially prompt an order to quarantine or isolate by the Westchester County Department of Health. What are the differences among the three?

#### *Exclusion from the School Environment*

This is a function of the City School District of New Rochelle. The school district, in contributing to a safe, secure, and healthy school environment, may remove a student or employee from the school building or environment for the safety and health of all other occupants. When there is a concern regarding a student's, visitor's, or an employee's health, the school nurse or administrator can require that a person leave the school premises, see a physician for a checkup, diagnosis, or to be cleared to return to school/work prior to the person returning to the school building. Board of Education Policy 5440 states, "The building Principal shall send home any student who, in the school nurse's judgment, is not well enough to attend and benefit from academic instruction or whose continued attendance would jeopardize the student's health or the health of other students."

As such, when a student, visitor, or employee demonstrates symptoms such as those related to a cold or flu, the school nurse or administrator can determine that the person may be sent home and directed to receive medical attention to be cleared to return to the school or building. This directive for medical review may include a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test for COVID-19. If a person is sent home from school or work due to suspected COVID-19 symptoms, the school nurse will request in writing that a

primary care physician evaluate the student/employee and establish a baseline diagnosis. This diagnosis must be returned to the school nurse (for students)/tracking nurse (for employees) to be cleared to return to the school building. If an alternative non-COVID-19 diagnosis is indicated through a negative PCR test and the student/employee is asymptomatic for 24 hours, the student/employee may return to school. This function allows the school district to return a student/employee to the school environment at its discretion.

### *Quarantine*

This is a function of the Department of Health and may not be overridden by the City School District of New Rochelle. The school district works in consultation with the Westchester County Department of Health regarding all COVID-19-related matters. The District and its schools are not authorized to declare a quarantine.

Upon the report of a positive COVID-19 test result, the school district will report the positive case(s) of COVID-19 to the Westchester County Department of Health. The school district will enact the “Contact Tracing Protocol” to determine any students/employees who potentially may have been in close contact with the positive person.

Currently, the Centers for Disease and Controls, the New York State Department of Health, and the Westchester County Department of Health define “close contact” as:

- An **adult or student who is within 6 feet of an infected adult or student** for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more **in a cafeteria, hallway, or on the school bus**, even if both the infected and the exposed persons correctly and consistently wear well-fitting masks the entire time.
- An **adult or student who is within 6 feet of an infected adult** for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more **in a cafeteria, hallway, on the school bus, or in the classroom setting**, even if both the infected and the exposed persons correctly and consistently wear well-fitting masks the entire time.
- An **adult who is within 6 feet of an infected student** for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more **in the classroom setting** even if both the infected and the exposed persons correctly and consistently wear well-fitting masks the entire time.
- A **student who is within 3 feet of an infected student** for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more **in the classroom setting** even if both the infected and the exposed persons correctly and consistently wear well-fitting masks the entire time.

Once the building/school district completes the Contact Tracing Protocol to determine which persons may be considered “close contacts,” the list is sent to the Westchester County Department of Health for its team to begin the quarantine protocol. Only the Westchester County Department of Health can declare a quarantine status for a person, or remove a person from quarantine status. Persons are not allowed by the Westchester County Department of Health to “test out” of a quarantine by taking either a rapid or PCR COVID-19 test. Please see the Westchester County Department of Health’s Quarantine Protocol for 2019 - Novel Coronavirus [here](#).

### *Isolation*

This is a function of the Department of Health and may not be overridden by the City School District of New Rochelle. The school district works in consultation with the Westchester County Department of Health regarding all COVID-19-related matters. The school district and its schools are not authorized to declare isolation.

Upon the report of a positive COVID-19 test result, the school district will report the positive case(s) of COVID-19 to the Westchester County Department of Health. The Westchester County Department of Health will contact the positive person(s) and place her/him/them in isolation. The school district will enact the "Contact Tracing Protocol" to determine any students/employees who potentially may have been in close contact with the positive person.

Only the Westchester County Department of Health can declare an isolation status for a person, or remove a person from isolation status. Persons are not allowed by the Westchester County Department of Health to "test out" of isolation by taking either a rapid or PCR COVID-19 test. Please see the Westchester County Department of Health's Isolation Protocol for 2019- Novel Coronavirus [here](#).