

August 3, 2020

Dear Families,

I hope you are safe and healthy, and finding some rest and relaxation this summer. As we are approaching the start of the 2020-21 school year, I want to share some important new information with you about health and safety protocols in your child's school—and every school—for the upcoming year.

All schools are preparing for blended learning, during which students learn in-person in school buildings for part of the week, and continue learning remotely from home on the other days. However, any family can choose 100% remote learning for any reason. If your preference is 100% remote learning, we ask that you let us know by this Friday, August 7, so that schools have enough time to plan. Please visit schools.nyc.gov/returntoschool2020 to fill out a short web form, or call 311.

In this letter you will find:

- **Criteria to Open Schools and Keep them Open**
- **What Happens if Someone Gets Sick:** New Information on COVID-19 Testing and Tracing in Schools
- **Overall Health and Safety Protocols for Every School**

[Criteria to Open Schools and Keep them Open](#)

While we continue to carefully monitor a constantly changing health landscape, one thing remains steadfast: our commitment to the health and safety of our students, teachers, and staff. This priority is the foundation of all of our policy moving into September.

On July 31, the Mayor and I announced that for school buildings to open in September and remain open, on a weekly average the city must see fewer than 3% of all COVID-19 tests come back positive. Additionally, if 3% or more of New Yorkers who are tested for COVID-19 are found to have the virus after we open, school buildings will close again, and 100% of learning will be remote for every student.

Since June, we've hovered around 1-2%, and are working closely with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health), NYC Test + Trace, and the Mayor's Office to prepare for a coordinated school reopening. If staff and students aren't healthy, they can't teach and learn, and we are doing all we can to ensure that schools remain safe and healthy for learning.

[What Happens if Someone Gets Sick: New Information on COVID-19 Testing and Tracing in Schools](#)

In close collaboration with our expert colleagues at NYC Health, we have developed strict protocols that address prevention, precaution, and response to one or more of our students or employees having a confirmed case of COVID-19. It's important to know that a "confirmed case" means that a parent or guardian, student, or staff member submits a positive test result from a healthcare provider or laboratory—like a City-run testing site, a private doctor, or an urgent care center—to the school.

Our protocols to keep school communities healthy include:

- **Prevention:** Starting with the first day of the 2020-21 school year, if a student or staff member is feeling sick, they are required to stay home. Additionally, if their symptoms are consistent with COVID-19, they will be asked to get tested.
- **Feeling Sick in School:** If a student begins experiencing symptoms in school, they will be isolated and monitored by a school staff member until they are picked up by their parent or guardian. Staff members who become symptomatic at school must notify administration and immediately leave the building.
- **Testing:** All school staff members are asked to get [tested](#) for COVID-19 in the days leading up to the beginning of school, and will be prioritized for expedited results at the 34 City-run testing sites. All school staff are also asked to get tested monthly during the school year. This free testing is also available for families citywide.
- **Tracing:** In the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case in a school, NYC Test + Trace and NYC Health will investigate to determine close contacts within the school. All students and teachers in the classroom with the confirmed case are assumed close contacts and will be instructed to self-quarantine for 14 days since their last exposure to that case. In older grades where students may travel between classes, this applies to all classes that the confirmed case was in.

If there's more than one case in a school, and it's not in the same classroom, learning will continue remotely and the school building will close for at least 24 hours while NYC Test + Trace and NYC Health investigate. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, affected classrooms or the whole building will remain closed for 14 days for quarantine.

Students will continue their learning remotely during any necessary quarantine periods.

- **Communication:** Whether symptoms begin at home or in school, there will be a clear flow of information to facilitate fast action and prevent spread. If a COVID-19 case is confirmed, schools will communicate to all families and students at school.

Overall Health and Safety Protocols for Every School

Testing and tracing are part of several strict health protocols designed to keep our school communities healthy. Here are the key things that you and your family should know about NYC Department of Education (DOE) health and safety practices, policies, and protocols as we re-open our school buildings in September:

- At all times, students and staff must wear face coverings protecting their nose and mouth while at school or on their way to school. Exceptions will be made for children who can't wear a face covering for medical reasons, and for younger children who aren't developmentally able to wear a face covering.
- Students and staff must maintain six feet of physical distancing throughout the school day, anywhere on school grounds and to and from school.
- Schools will be cleaned throughout the day and disinfected each night, with special attention to high-touch areas.
- Face coverings, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies will be readily available in throughout every school.

- Every school will have a school-based team ready to respond in the event that there is a health concern in a school.
- Every school will have a designated isolation room for use in the event that a student becomes ill during the school day.

For more details on these and other policies, please visit schools.nyc.gov/returntoschool2020 and click “Health and Safety” for additional information and all the latest updates.

We are approaching reopening by centering health and safety and basing our policies on the expertise of health professionals—period.

I’ve been a public school parent, teacher, and principal, and I know what it feels like to want the best possible education for your child while ensuring the health and safety of your entire family. We have collectively learned a lot since March—both about the virus, and about our ability to react and respond to it in real time. That’s why we won’t settle for anything but the strictest and most rigorous processes for coming back to school.

We will send more information in the coming days and weeks. As always—thank you for being part of the DOE family.

Sincerely,



Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education