



ULSTER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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ULSTER COUNTY GUIDANCE FOR 2021-2022 SCHOOL REOPENING

Background

On January 30, 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) declared novel coronavirus a public health emergency. On January 31, Health and Human Secretary Alex Azar declared a Public Health Emergency for the United States. On February 11, 2020, the causative virus was named Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus -2 (SARS CoV-2) and the disease Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). On March 7, Governor Andrew Cuomo declared a State of Emergency in the State of New York. On March 11, WHO declared it a global pandemic. On March 13, County Executive Patrick Ryan declared a State of Emergency in Ulster County and all schools were ordered to close at 4:00 PM that day. Rigorous public health measures and lockdown resulted in the flattening of the curve for new infections; however, cases rose sharply in the fall and continued through the winter of 2020. Schools reopened in the fall of 2020 prior to the second surge in COVID-19 infections in Ulster County. The 2020-2021 school year included a combination of remote and in-person learning for all Ulster County school districts, with most districts returning to full-time in-person learning between spring break and commencement. On June 24, 2021, Governor Cuomo announced that New York's COVID-19 State Disaster Emergency had ended. On August 5, 2021 New York State Health Commissioner announced that the New York State Health Department would not be providing guidance to school districts related to re-opening schools.

Currently, approximately seventy percent of Ulster County residents over the age of twelve have received at least one dose of the vaccine and approximately sixty-five percent have received the completed series. However, it is not anticipated that a vaccine will be approved for children under twelve until late fall or early winter. Through much of the spring and early summer COVID-19 cases in Ulster County were on the decline and as few as one or two cases were reported daily. On July 2, 2021 the active case count was 14 cases; however, due to the Delta variant, cases began to climb. The active cases in Ulster County have risen to 265 as of August 9, 2021. Out of 107,798 Ulster County residents who are fully vaccinated, 228 have contracted COVID-19 as of August 9, 2021. This equates to a .002 infection rate. Due to the small possibility that vaccinated individuals can transmit the virus, the CDC recommends that everyone, including those who are vaccinated, wear masks indoors in areas of high transmission. As of August 9, 2021, Ulster County remains an area of high transmission.

Ulster County Guidance

- All school districts should follow the CDC guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html> and NYSED Health and Safety Guide for the 2021-2022 School Year found at <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/back-school/nysed-health-and-safety-guide-for-the-2021-2022-school-year.pdf>
- Taking into consideration the importance of in-person learning to both the mental and social well-being of children and their development, we strongly recommend a return to 5 days a week full-time in-person learning for all students.
- Based on the current CDC guidance, all individuals (faculty, staff, students, and contractors) should be required to wear masks at all times inside school buildings regardless of vaccination status. Mask breaks should be offered to students throughout the day. Masks are not required while eating and seated but should be worn at other times in the cafeteria.
- Social distancing of 3 feet should be considered, where feasible.
- Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and students remain at least 3 feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating “one-way routes” in hallways).
- Create distance between children on school buses (e.g., seat children one child per row, skip rows) when possible. If this distancing is not possible, windows should be open at all times. All children and staff must always wear masks while on the bus.
- Ensure all spaces are properly ventilated. Proper ventilation can be accomplished through various strategies, which include but are not limited to, moving fresh air into the building through open doors and windows, using fans and air conditioning units in each classroom to circulate the air, standalone air purifiers, or retrofitting HVAC systems.
- Intense preparation should take place prior to school reopening to ensure that all feasible, practical, and acceptable mitigation measures are in place. Other than those listed in this document, such measures include handwashing and respiratory etiquette, cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine in coordination with the Ulster County Health Department, and encouraging sick faculty, staff, and students to stay home
- It is also critically important to develop strategies that can be quickly revised and adapted, depending on the level of viral transmission in the school and throughout the community, as this may change rapidly. This includes the ability for schools to switch to remote learning as necessary.
- Continued use of health screening for any individual entering the buildings is recommended.
- Faculty and staff who do not provide proof of vaccination should be required to participate in weekly screening testing for COVID-19. All faculty and staff should be encouraged to participate in regular screening testing for COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status.

- Students who have not provided proof of vaccination should be encouraged to participate in regular screening testing for COVID-19. Student athletes and other students participating in extracurricular activities, regardless of vaccination status, should be required to participate in weekly screening testing for COVID-19.