



Northeast District Department of Health

69 South Main Street, Unit 4, Brooklyn, CT 06234
860-774-7350 / Fax 860-774-1308 www.nddh.org

MEMO UPDATE

To: School Officials
From: Sue Starkey, MPH, MS, RD, Director of Health
Date: October 3, 2020
Re: - NDDH Protocols for Coordination of COVID-19 Response with Schools
- Contact Information
- Suggestions for School Protocols for COVID-19 Response Activities

NDDH Protocols for Coordination of COVID-19 Response with Schools

All NDDH protocols are subject to change. Find the most current version at:
<https://www.nddh.org/services/emergency-preparedness/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/>

Notification of a Case by NDDH to a School

Upon receipt of notification from a physician, laboratory, or the CT COVID-19 Contact Tracing system that a COVID-19 Case (an individual who has been confirmed as being positive by laboratory testing) has been present at a school, school property or school event, the NDDH Public Health Nurse will notify the NDDH Director of Health that a Case has been identified and will call the appropriate school nurse.

Communication of Confidential Information

The NDDH Public Health Nurse will only discuss private health information with the School Nurse. The NDDH Director of Health may grant special exceptions to allow the NDDH Public Health Nurse to discuss private health information with other school representatives on a need-to-know basis. Superintendents may submit a list of additional individuals who have been trained by the school in appropriate privacy laws and COVID-19 response activities as alternate persons to conduct COVID-19 tracking with specific permission to receive and share confidential information. It is recommended that this person be a health professional trained in contact tracing.

Contact Tracing

The NDDH Public Health Nurse will work with school nurses or approved school personnel to identify all close Contacts of COVID-19 Cases in accordance with all public health guidelines. "Contacts" are individuals who spent at least 15 minutes within six feet of a confirmed Case or had a direct exposure such as being sneezed or coughed on in the face. NDDH will provide guidance to school officials on how to determine who is a contact and how long to exclude individuals from school based on symptoms or status as a case or contact. NDDH will work with schools to ensure that all Contacts receive timely and accurate information to protect themselves and others from COVID-19.

Assistance in Preparing Notifications to Students, Staff, Families, or the Public

Requests from schools for assistance in writing letters or other forms of notification will be accepted from Superintendents and submitted to the Director of Health or designee.

Superintendents may submit a list of additional individuals who have been approved to work with NDDH to write official school notifications.

Under no circumstances will private health information be discussed by the Director of Health or designee when preparing any notifications. School officials are expected to maintain the same standards regarding confidential information.

NDDH and CSDE have shared notification templates that schools may use to provide information to parents and the school community. Schools are asked to ensure that NDDH approves any notification that includes alternative language describing NDDH activities and to copy NDDH on all correspondence that references NDDH. Schools should send these requests and notifications to NDDH Education and Communications Coordinator Linda Colangelo at lcolangelo@nddh.org.

Lines of Communication

It is important that NDDH and school officials are able to reach each other on a 24/7 basis. NDDH will provide superintendents, principals, school nurses, and COVID-19 liaisons with the email addresses, telephone numbers and job title/responsibilities for NDDH staff assigned to COVID-19 activities. School officials are expected to provide NDDH with all necessary contact information.

NDDH Contact Information

NDDH Main Number – 860-774-7350

Director of Health Sue Starkey – x. 119; Cell – 860-377-7982 – sstarkey@nddh.org

Public Health Nurse Janine Vose x. 124; **New Cell # – 860-377-1280** – phnurse@nddh.org

Education & Communications Coordinator Linda Colangelo – x. 114; Cell – 860-450-2245
lcolangelo@nddh.org

NDDH Office Hours

NDDH office hours are Monday – Thursday, 8:00 am – 4:00 pm and Fridays 8:00 am – noon. Please leave a message if calling outside office hours. Contact appropriate personnel above via cell phone for urgent matters.

Schools are welcome to build their protocols based on current Northeast District Department of Health (NDDH) protocols.

Suggestions for School Protocols for COVID-19 Response Activities

The following suggestions, guidance, and recommended language are provided for consideration when drafting your school protocols.

Staff Training

It is recommended that school nurses complete training in contact tracing and all individuals involved in COVID-19 response efforts be trained in appropriate protocols and privacy laws.

Communicating Events of Concern to NDDH

Schools are to provide NDDH with complete contact information for Superintendents, Principals, School Nurses and COVID-19 Liaisons sufficient to ensure that these individuals can be contacted 24/7.

Should there be an event of concern in a school—an individual with symptoms or who is identified as a case, contact, or a suspected case, or suspected contact:

- **the School Nurse** – or assigned staff such as the COVID-19 Liaison--should
 - Refer to *Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut’s Plan to Learn and Grow Together* Addendum 5 *Interim Guidance for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios in CT School Districts* from the CSDE (available at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/COVID-19/Addendum-5-Interim-Guidance-for-Responding-to-COVID-19-Scenarios-in-CT-School-Districts.pdf>).
 - Inform the appropriate school authorities according to school district policies while adhering to all required privacy laws and procedures.
 - Contact the NDDH public health nurse by cell phone 860-377-1280 or email phnurse@nddh.org for assistance—including initiating isolation/quarantine and contact tracing. If you are unable to reach the public health nurse, please call the NDDH main office number 860-774-7350.

- **the School Superintendent** or Head of School should
 - Refer to Addendum 9 at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/COVID-19/Addendum9-Contact-Tracing-Scenarios-in-Schools.pdf>
 - Contact the NDDH Director of Health at 860-377-7982 to discuss the anticipated school response—including partial or complete school closures and announcements to parents, the public or the media.
 - Under no circumstances will private health information be discussed by the director of health or designee when preparing any notifications or school response plans.
 - Each decision will be based on the unique conditions impacting the school.

Communications Coordination/Lines of Communication

Notification of a COVID-19 Case in a school setting may raise concern for parents and the school community. Case investigations and contact tracing may be complicated. To the extent possible to assure clear and consistent communications, it is important for NDDH and schools to communicate clearly while maintaining confidentiality; collaborate effectively and efficiently; and align messages to “speak in one voice.” Adhering to these principles will assure that students, parents, the school community, general public and media receive transparent, timely, and accurate information.

NDDH will not speak on behalf of the schools and schools will not speak on behalf of NDDH.

Notifications Released by School Officials

Best practice is to review with the NDDH Director of Health prior to release and include NDDH staff on all COVID-19 notifications—including press releases, emails or phone call notifications—to school communities, families and the general public by copying:

Sue Starkey, Director of Health sstarkey@nddh.org

Janine Vose, Public Health Nurse, phnurse@nddh.org

Linda Colangelo, Ed & Comm Coordinator, lcolangelo@nddh.org

Please include NDDH main number on phone call alerts: 860-774-7350.

The [school system] will determine when and how often to release notifications. Notifications should be limited to occasions where individuals have been identified as a laboratory-confirmed positive Case AND having been in close contact with one or more individuals in a school system setting. Notifications are not expected or suggested in response to contacts of cases or individuals with symptoms of COVID-19.

NDDH and the CSDE have provided schools with Template Notifications for releases to parents or the community. NDDH is to be consulted if alternative language is proposed by the school by contacting NDDH Education and Communications Coordinator Linda Colangelo at lcolangelo@nddh.org.