

Updated Return to School Guidance

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October 7, 2021

Dear Colleagues:

Today the Monroe County Department of Public Health (MCDPH) released to area school districts the following updated guidance documents (click the links to download):

- [Assessment of Symptomatic Student, Teacher or Staff Member With No Known Exposure Regardless of Vaccination Status](#)
- [Unvaccinated Student, Teacher or Staff Member Exposed to COVID-19: Quarantine Process](#)
- [Vaccinated Student, Teacher or Staff Member Exposed to COVID-19: Processes for Symptomatic and Asymptomatic Individuals](#)

The guidance in these documents mirrors the recommendations of NYS DOH. While assessment by a healthcare provider is strongly encouraged, area schools have been notified that **documentation of a healthcare provider visit is no longer required**. Documentation of a negative PCR or NAAT (e.g., Molecular, NEAR, LAMP), improving symptoms and 24 hours fever-free are the only requirements for returning to school. **In accordance with NYS DOH requirements, results from rapid antigen tests, including home test kits, are not acceptable.**

Complementing these documents from MCDPH is the [Interim Triage and Testing Protocol for COVID-19 for Return to School](#) (click the link to download) developed by the Finger Lakes Reopening Schools Safely Task Force. This algorithm was developed for the specific use of healthcare providers to help ensure children are assessed and returned to school in a safe manner. Highlights from this interim guidance document include:

- The workflow from positive symptom screen to obtaining a COVID test involves **assessment** by a healthcare provider. RNs may triage to determine if a MD, DO, NP, or PA **visit** – either in-person or telehealth – is appropriate.
- Schools should only require documentation of an acceptable, negative test with appropriate resolution of fever and symptom improvement for return to school.
- However, return to school **without a test** does require documentation by a healthcare provider (MD, DO, NP, PA) of an alternate diagnosis *OR* documentation that symptoms are consistent with those of a chronic medical condition without new or worsening symptoms.

In either case (alternate diagnosis or chronic medical condition), documentation needs to include the language that “COVID-19 is not suspected.” **Please note that non-specific viral or bacterial illnesses** (including URI, viral illness, pharyngitis, bronchitis, pneumonia, sinusitis, otitis media, and viral gastrointestinal illness) **will not be acceptable as stand-alone, alternate diagnoses**. But when in doubt, TEST! E.g., patients can have allergies *and* illness!

Relative to testing, our region’s healthcare systems and laboratories are working collaboratively with county health departments and healthcare providers to set up centralized swab and sample collection sites to streamline access for children/school teachers/staff and better support the [Triage and Testing Protocol](#). Additional information regarding these sites will be released as soon as available.

Thank you, as always, to you and your practice/healthcare teams for your incredible commitment and work on behalf of children and families.

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