



PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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A PHAB-ACCREDITED HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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MEMORANDUM

To: Putnam County School Districts

From: Commissioner of Health, Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD

Subject: Safe In-Person Learning K-12 Schools

Date: August 17, 2021

When it comes to emerging public health concerns, experts review data and update guidance as more information becomes available. To inform decision-making as we embark on the 2021-2022 school year, recent evidence regarding the impacts of the Delta variant (and other variants of concern) should be considered. At this time, we know that COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective against severe disease and death from current known variants of the virus that causes COVID-19, including the Delta variant. The Delta variant (which is currently estimated to account for over 80% of cases in the United States and nearly 82% of cases in CDC Region 2, which includes New York Stateⁱ) causes more infections and spreads faster than earlier forms of the virus. Infections among fully vaccinated individuals are less likely to occur, however a fully vaccinated individual infected with the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus can spread the virus to others.ⁱⁱ

Putnam County Schools have always provided safe and supportive environments for our children to learn and grow academically as well as socially and emotionally. They are also hubs for students and families to receive support services and information from trusted sources. While so much about the current landscape is in-flux, one thing is certain: In-person learning is a priority. To achieve the greatest social, emotional, and academic impact, the New York State Education Department has developed a Health and Safety Guide for the 2021-2022 School Yearⁱⁱⁱ which encompasses the CDC Guidance.^{iv} These guides, when read together, should provide our local school districts with the tools needed to prioritize in-person learning while also addressing essential health and safety concerns.

Currently, for the purpose of contact tracing, the Putnam County Department of Health intends to utilize the CDC exception^v for close contacts in a school setting unless or until the New York State Department of Health provides updated guidance for the 2021-2022 academic year. Implementation of this exception relies on fully-adopted universal indoor mask use in school settings.

The role of the Putnam County Department of Health continues to be one of support and guidance. Our communicable disease staff will continue to monitor levels of community transmission and identify and contain active or potential outbreaks. PCDOH remains committed to our mission to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community—and we appreciate your partnership, especially during this challenging time.

ⁱ <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#variant-proportions>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/back-school/nysed-health-and-safety-guide-for-the-2021-2022-school-year.pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/k-12-guidance.html>

^v In the **K–12 indoor classroom** setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a [clinically compatible illness](#)) if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) [correctly and consistently](#) wore well-fitting [masks](#) the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact>