



Department of Public Health

Monroe County, New York

Adam J. Bello
County Executive

Marielena Vélez de Brown, MD, MPH
Commissioner of Public Health

November 20, 2025

Dear Superintendent:

Rochester's winters can be harsh, and periods of extreme cold present real challenges for school districts. Determining when temperatures should prompt school closures is an often-difficult decision. As research and guidance on cold weather safety continue to evolve, the Monroe County Department of Public Health remains committed to providing clear, up-to-date information to support your decision-making.

The National Weather Service (NWS) issues **COLD WEATHER ADVISORIES** when temperatures or wind chills of -15°F are predicted, and **EXTREME COLD WARNINGS** at -25°F . We have consulted with them on many occasions, but they do not make recommendations as to when schools should close based upon temperature or wind chill. The New York State Education Department also does not issue such guidance, so communities are on their own to make this important decision. While Health Departments have no legal authority on when to close schools due to weather conditions, we believe it is our role to make recommendations on such health matters.

Temperatures can vary within Monroe County and therefore among school districts. For instance, wind chill temperatures along the lakeshore can be very different than in downtown Rochester. So the question remains: "How cold is too cold to have school?" Unfortunately, there is not a simple answer to this question. As noted in the attached chart, frostbite can occur on exposed skin in about 30 minutes at wind chills of -25°F . At wind chills of -40°F , frostbite can affect exposed skin in as little as 10 minutes.

Local meteorologists typically forecast a range of temperatures. They will often use language such as "we are expecting wind chill temperatures of -25°F to -35°F in the morning." Wind chills this low can be dangerous depending on how children are dressed, whether students have to walk long distances to school, if children have long waits for the bus, etc. **Taking everything into consideration, to lessen the risk of cold injury to students, I recommend that you use a wind chill of about -25°F as the temperature to consider closing school buildings and delivering instruction remotely.**

I am very much aware of the impact of closing schools. We receive calls from parents each winter on this subject. We discuss the issue with them, but remind them that this is a school decision. I hope you find this information to be useful.

Sincerely,

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Wind Chill Chart

