2020/2021 COVID-19 Response Protocols

Handbook Addendum

Overview

The goal of the Watertown Public Schools is for the **safe** return of as many students as possible when it is appropriate to do so. This handbook addendum is designed to provide all members of the Watertown Public Schools Community with the necessary information, guidelines, procedures and policies to safely and effectively participate in the educational program this year. This section is meant for students and parents both during hybrid, in-person education and remote learning as well. It is imperative that all families read and review the contents of this addendum.

These protocols and procedures may differ from guidelines provided by the CDC or Massachusetts Department of Health. They apply only to Watertown Public Schools activities.

A safe return to in-person school environments will require a culture of health and safety every step of the way.

Specifically:

- **Students, with the assistance of families, must also be monitored daily for symptoms and Staff must monitor themselves for symptoms daily. Staff and students must stay home if feeling unwell.** Everyone must do their part to protect others and not come to school if they are exhibiting any COVID-19 symptoms or are feeling sick.

- **Masks are among the most important single measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.** The Watertown Public School District is committed to providing a safe environment as schools reopen during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to public health experts, one of the best ways to stop the spread of coronavirus and to keep members of our school community safe is the use of face masks or face coverings. Therefore, in accordance with guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), the following requirements are in place until further notice.

    - A mask or face covering that covers the nose and mouth must be worn by all individuals in school buildings, on school grounds, and on school transportation, even when social distancing is observed. Face shields may be worn for additional protection, but they **do not** replace masks.

    - In addition, masks or face coverings will not be required for anyone who has a medical, behavioral or other challenge making it unsafe to wear a face mask or face covering. A written note from a physician is required for a requested exemption. Parents may not excuse their child from the face mask requirement by signing a waiver.

    - Face masks or face coverings will not be required when appropriate social distancing is enforced:

        - during mask breaks lasting less than 10 minutes
        - while eating or drinking

- Exceptions to this policy under certain circumstances, such as for students with medical, behavioral or other challenges who are unable to wear masks, must be approved by the building principal in consultation with the school nurse or local Board of Health. Face shields or physical barriers may provide an alternative in some instances.

- WPS will provide three washable masks for each child and teacher. In addition, the district will supply disposable face covering for individuals who arrive at a building, or board school transportation, without one.

- If students are in violation of this policy, the building principal will consult with the parent/guardians to determine whether an exception is appropriate, or the student may be removed from the school building for in-person learning until such time as they can comply with the requirement or the requirement is lifted. Violations of this policy by staff will be handled in the same manner as other violations of School Committee policy.

- Visitors in violation of this policy will be denied entry to the school/district facility.

- **Hand hygiene is critical.** Students and staff are required to exercise hand hygiene (handwashing or sanitizing) upon arrival to school, before eating, before putting on and taking off masks, and before dismissal. Handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is the best practice. However, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol should be substituted when handwashing is not available. Hand sanitizer stations will be set up for student use where school staff are typically present, such as common areas, hallways, and classrooms.

- **Physical distance greatly reduces the risk of transmission.** Physical distancing is a critical tool in preventing the spread of COVID-19. The CDC[1] and DPH[2] recommend 6 feet of distance between individuals when feasible. According to research provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 3 to 6 feet with other mitigation measures is recommended.
    - All students regardless of age must wear masks on school transportation buses at all times.

- **Cohorts/assigned seating.** Students will be organized in groups/classrooms and other cohorts to help mitigate transmission of the virus and seats will be assigned wherever possible (classrooms, buses)

The Watertown Public Schools will follow the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's procedures for addressing incidences of COVID-19 in schools. The full procedural manual can be found on the Watertown Public Schools Website and at the following link: http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/on-desktop/protocols/. Translations of the document are available using this link in Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Vietnamese, and Haitian Creole.

RESPONDING TO COVID-19 SCENARIOS

Even as we remain vigilant, and public health metrics in Massachusetts remain positive, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in school will not be zero. As we prepare to reopen schools, we must also prepare to respond to potential COVID-19 scenarios, whether in school, on the bus, or in our communities. Depending on the circumstances, a

[1] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html
[2] https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-prevention-and-treatment#social-distancing-

positive COVID-19 test, a potentially symptomatic student, or exposure to someone in the outside community who has COVID-19 can each have health, safety, and operational implications.

Providing Remote Learning when Students are Quarantined

When students must stay home for quarantine or isolation due to COVID-19, teaching and learning should not stop. We will provide remote learning for students who cannot be in school for any extended period of time. School nurses must approve remote learning based on medical information regarding the need for an extended absence.

Testing, tracing, and isolation

The District continues to provide weekly pooled surveillance testing to all Watertown Public Schools students, and as of April 5, 2021, this testing ***will be mandated for all students who are learning in-person.*** The purpose of this testing protocol is to identify and swiftly isolate asymptomatic, and pre-symptomatic students who are COVID-19 positive. This protocol allows exemptions to COVID-19 testing in preschool - grade 12 for those individuals who have a health contraindication documented by a physician. A child shall be exempted from the requirement for mandatory COVID-19 testing if a nurse practitioner, physician, or physician's assistant determine that it is not possible due to medical condition(s), disability, tactile sensitivity, or other health or safety factors for the student to participate in COVID-19 testing.

The availability of in-person instruction and the district's in-person health and safety implementation guidelines will be determined and continually assessed using up-to-date data and guidelines provided by the Watertown Health Department, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

The Coronavirus is a highly contagious disease that spreads easily without the proper safety mitigations. The adjustment from 6 to 3 feet requires a more stringent mitigation strategy, which includes mandatory testing for all students. The majority of staff members at this time have started their vaccination regimen, and staff will continue to participate in weekly testing until fully vaccinated. When families select in-person instruction five days a week at a distance of less than six feet, they agree to and understand the health and safety expectations as outlined by the district including but not limited to wearing a mask, participating in COVID-19 universal surveillance pooled testing, and abiding by social distance guidelines. COVID-19 universal surveillance pooled testing will be completed once a week with a non-invasive anterior nasal swab testing protocol and is mandatory for all students who are learning in-person. All students who will be returning to full 5-day in-person instruction will be required to fill out the "Commitment to In-Person Learning, COVID Protocols, and Consent for Pooled Testing" form prior to returning to in-person school.

If a pool comes back with a positive result, all members who were part of the pool will be offered free individual reflex PCR COVID-19 testing through the District. A family may also choose to take their child to an outside clinic for a follow-up PCR test. A negative result on a PCR test will be required to return to school. Once the positive individual is identified, contract tracing will determine any close contacts that need to be notified. All students in an elementary classroom will be considered a close contact.

It is important to note that testing, combined with vaccinations, contact tracing and isolation, helps control the spread of COVID-19 in Massachusetts. All individual positive test results are reported to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and to our local Watertown Health Department.

Most common symptoms of COVID-19 and testing requirements

The single most important thing to do if any of the following symptoms are present is to **STAY HOME**. Our collective health relies, in part, on individual attention and responsibility. Note that some symptoms of COVID-19 are the

same as the flu or a bad cold; please do not assume it is another condition. When in doubt, stay home. Parents need to review each of these symptoms for your child(ren) every morning, and if your child has any of them, they must stay home.

Please STAY HOME if you have any of the symptoms listed.

Below is the full list of symptoms for which caregivers should monitor their children, and staff should monitor themselves **EVERY MORNING**:[3] [4]

- ❏ Fever (100.0° Fahrenheit or higher), chills, or shaking chills (CDC has lowered the temperature from 100.4 to 100.0)
- ❏ Cough (not due to other known cause, such as chronic cough)
- ❏ Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- ❏ New loss of taste or smell
- ❏ Sore throat
- ❏ Headache *when in combination with other symptoms*
- ❏ Muscle aches or body aches
- ❏ Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- ❏ Fatigue, when in combination with other symptoms
- ❏ Nasal congestion or runny nose (not due to other known causes, such as allergies) *when in combination with other symptoms*

Please note that we encourage every child to receive a flu vaccination. The reason for this requirement is that the flu and COVID-19 have similar symptoms.

If staff or students have any of these symptoms, they must get a negative PCR test for active COVID-19 infection prior to returning to school or quarantine for at least 14 days.

****If you or a member of your household has tested positive for COVID-19 or is in the process being tested due to exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, *please KEEP YOUR CHILD(REN) HOME and contact the school nurse*.**

Self-isolation for COVID-19 positive cases is a minimum of 10 days

Most people who test positive and have a relatively mild illness will need to stay in self-isolation for at least 10 days. People who test positive can resume public activities after 10 days and once they have:

a. gone for 3 days without a fever (and without taking fever-reducing medications like Tylenol); and
b. experienced improvement in other symptoms (for example, their cough has gotten much better); and
c. received clearance from public health authority contact tracers (the local board of health or Community Tracing Collaborative).

Repeat testing prior to return is not recommended. Return to school should be based on time and symptom resolution.

Close contacts of a positive COVID-19 case should be tested. For general guidance, DPH defines close contact as:[5]

- Being within less than 6 feet of COVID-19 case (someone who has tested positive) for at least 15 minutes (continuous or intermittent). Close contact can occur while caring for, living with, visiting, or sharing a healthcare waiting area or room with a COVID-19 case while the case was symptomatic or within the 48 hours before symptom onset, OR

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[3] Massachusetts DPH, Testing of Persons with Suspect COVID-19. (2020, May 13).
[4] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html
[5] https://www.mass.gov/doc/covid-19-testing-guidance/download

- Having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on) while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment.

Vaccinated individuals

Per the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, persons who are fully vaccinated (defined as a person who is 14 days post full vaccination regimen), are not required to quarantine if they are in contact with a positive individual. However, if they exhibit signs and symptoms of COVID 19 they will need to quarantine until they can provide a negative COVID 19 test.

If someone in the school setting tests positive

- If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, their close contacts will be defined as only those who have been within 6 feet of distance of the individual for at least fifteen minutes, while the person was infectious. The infectious period begins 2 days prior to symptom onset. If someone is asymptomatic, the infectious period is considered to begin 2 days prior to the collection of their positive test. ***Students in an elementary classroom will be considered close contacts even if they were more than six feet away from the infected individual.***

When a close contact may return to school

- All close contacts should be tested but must self-quarantine for 14 days after the last exposure to the person who tested positive, regardless of test result. Even if an individual identified as a close contact receives a negative test result, they must continue to self-quarantine for the full 14 days as the virus may take up to 14 days to cause illness.

When a student/staff person may return to school after COVID-19 symptoms

- If a student or staff member has COVID-19-like symptoms, they may return to school after they have tested negative for COVID-19, have improvement in symptoms, and have been without fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications. If a provider makes an alternative diagnosis for the COVID-19-like symptoms, the individual is still required to be tested for COVID 19. If their PCR COVID 19 test is negative, they may return to school based on the recommendations for that alternative diagnosis (e.g., influenza or strep pharyngitis).
- If a student or staff member presents COVID-19-like symptoms and chooses not to be tested, they may return to school 14 days from start of symptoms, as long as their symptoms have improved and they have been without fever for at least 24 hours prior to their return to school without the use of fever reducing medication.

Quick reference sheet: Key actions for individual COVID-19 events

Event	Location of Event	Testing Result	Quarantine
Individual is symptomatic	If an individual is symptomatic at home, they should stay home and get tested. If an individual student is symptomatic on the bus or at school, they should remain masked and	Individual tests **negative**	Return to school once asymptomatic for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.

	adhere to strict physical distancing. Students will then be met by the nurse and stay in the medical waiting room until they can go home. They should not be sent home on the bus. If an individual staff member is symptomatic at school, they should find coverage for their duties and then go home and get tested.	Individual tests **positive**	Remain home (except to get medical care), monitor symptoms, notify the school, notify personal close contacts, assist the school in contact tracing efforts, and answer the call from local board of health or MA Community Tracing Collaborative. Most people who have relatively mild illness will need to stay in self-isolation for at least 10 days **and** until at least 3 days have passed with no fever and improvement in other symptoms.
		Individual **is not tested**	Remain home in self-isolation for 14 days from symptom onset, then return once asymptomatic for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.
Individual is exposed to COVID-19 positive individual	If an individual is at home when they learn they were in close contact with an individual who tested positive for COVID-19, they should stay at home and be tested 4 or 5 days after their last exposure. If an individual is at school when they learn they were in close contact with an individual who tested positive for COVID-19, they should be masked for the remainder of the day (including K-1 students) and adhere to strict physical distancing. At the end of the day, they should go home and should not take the bus home. They should stay at home and be tested 4 or 5 days after their last exposure.	Individual tests **negative**	Remain home in self-quarantine for 14 days from exposure
		Individual tests **positive**	Remain home (except to get medical care), monitor symptoms, notify the school, notify personal close contacts, assist the school in contact tracing efforts, and answer the call from local board of health or MA Community Tracing Collaborative. Most people who have relatively mild illness will need to stay in self-isolation for at least 10 days **and** until at least 3 days have passed with no fever and improvement in other symptoms.
		Individual **is not tested**	Remain home in self-quarantine for 14 days from exposure

COMMUNICATION TO CLOSE CONTACTS

Watertown Public Schools will communicate with staff and families of students who are considered Close Contacts, ensuring that rights to privacy (HIIPA and FERPA) are not violated.

Procedures for Communication:

Communicate with families and staff of close contacts:

a. The school will identify the student's or staff member's possible "close contacts" based on the assigned seating charts and proximity related to class activities. Close contacts will be defined as

only those who have been within 6 feet of distance of the individual for at least fifteen minutes (continuous or intermittent), while the person was infectious. This definition is for students, teachers and other staff. The infectious period begins two days before symptom onset (or two days prior to the date of the positive test if asymptomatic) and includes up until the time the student/staff/teacher was isolated. Consider students and staff members who were close contacts in class, other school spaces, on the school bus, or at extracurricular activities. ***Students in an elementary classroom will be considered close contacts even if they were more than six feet away from the infected individual.***

b. The school will send a communication to the staff/teachers and families of students of close contacts that there has been a positive test without naming the individual student or staff member who tested positive.
c. Communications sent to families/staff will:
    i. Inform them there was a positive test (not the specific individual) in the student's class/bus or other activity.
    ii. Explain that since the student/staff were within 6 feet of the person with a positive test for 15 minutes or more, they are considered a "close contact" and therefore should be tested. Having assigned seating and keeping up-to-date seating charts will help identify who should be instructed to be tested: specifically, those who were sitting next to the student, plus any others who also had close contact with the student.)
    iii. Instruct close contacts to isolate prior to their test and while waiting for the results. In general, as the highest yield test will be a few days after the exposure, ideally, the test should occur no sooner than day 4 or 5 after the last exposure. (In other words, if an exposure lasted several days, the best time to test is 4 or 5 days after the end of the exposure period.)
    iv. Close contacts should be tested for COVID-19 at one of Massachusetts's test sites.[6] Sites may require pre-screening, a referral, and/or an appointment.
    v. Close contacts are asked to communicate their test results to the school. They should not return to school until they have quarantined for 14 days. This includes close contacts who receive a negative test result or who choose not to be tested.[7]
    vi. Remind families and/or staff of the importance of not having contact with higher-risk individuals (e.g., grandparents and those with underlying medical conditions).
    vii. Remind families and/or staff of the list of COVID-19 symptoms for which to monitor.
d. If the school finds out about the original COVID-19 positive test in the middle of a school day:
    i. The school should quickly identify the individuals who may be "close contacts" of the student and notify students and their families.
    ii. Make sure the students who could be considered close contacts are wearing masks. Extra masks as may be needed should be provided by the school. Enforce strict physical distancing. Require students to wash their hands.
    iii. Caregivers of close contacts may pick students up prior to the end of the day. Caregivers must wear a mask/face covering when picking up their student. Students who are close contacts and students with any symptoms should not ride the school bus to get home. Caregivers and students, as well as staff, should wash their hands upon arriving at home and change their clothes as a precaution.
    iv. Close contacts should not come back to school until they have quarantined for 14 days[8] and are asked to communicate their test results to the school.
e. As feasible, to assist with contact tracing, make a list including phone number and email of any other close contacts the student or staff member had, beginning two days before the onset of symptoms (or positive test if asymptomatic) until individual was isolated.

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[6] https://www.mass.gov/info-details/about-covid-19-testing#where-can-get-a-test?-
[7] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html
[8] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html