

Guidance for Mask Choice

- The New York State requirement for universal masking in schools has been lifted.
- Local health departments (LHD) may still tailor guidance to their jurisdiction. A LHD may implement masking requirements that are more restrictive than the state, and LHDs and Green Chimneys will collaborate on masking and testing decisions. *Green Chimneys is located in Putnam County and follows Putnam County Department of Health Guidance; including reinstating of masks if necessary.*
- **In all settings, isolation protocol is to be followed from Day 0 (symptom onset or positive test if asymptomatic). Masking continues to be required during and upon return from isolation during Days 6 through 10 after COVID-19 infection.** Students and essential staff members may return to work on Day 6. If you are able to do your job remotely, you may return on Day 11.
- Masking, regardless of vaccination status, is **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED** for 10 days after a known exposure.
- Testing on Day 5 after exposure is **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED** to detect infection among individuals identified as exposed or potentially exposed; identification of exposed individuals may be simplified by using group (e.g., classroom, school bus) rather than individual assessments.
- Green Chimneys will notify affected families, staff, and teachers of exposure to an individual who reports a new COVID-19 infection.
- Green Chimneys will supply testing for staff, residents, and students (with consent) for as long as supplies remain.

Students and staff are expected to stay at home when ill or symptomatic.

Exclude from school or work until at least 24 hours after fever breaks without fever-reducing medicine (such as Tylenol, or ibuprofen), and a SARS-CoV-2 test is negative. In this situation, this can be accomplished with either a PCR or antigen test.

Students, staff and teachers must wear masks on return to work or school during Days 6-10 of their isolation period and are encouraged to do so Days 0-10 of a known exposure.

Students, staff and teachers should wear masks when:

- They feel more comfortable wearing a mask for personal reasons.
- They were in the same room as someone diagnosed with COVID-19 for 15 minutes or longer and were thus exposed or potentially exposed.
- They are known to have been exposed to COVID-19 in any setting within the previous 10 days.
- They are moderately-to-severely immunocompromised and have discussed the need to mask with their healthcare provider(s).
- They have returned from isolation on Day 6.

Masks should be well-fitted and appropriately worn (to cover nose and mouth) and should conform to [CDC guidelines for masks and respirators](#).

Masking is no longer required on school buses or vans. Individuals who are required to wear masks in school should wear masks on school transport.

Masked and unmasked people will be working and learning alongside each other on campus. We are a “mask positive” environment; those who wear masks, whether by choice, expectation, or requirement, are not stigmatized, bullied, or made to feel uncomfortable, and likewise, those for whom masks have not been required or recommended are not stigmatized, bullied, or made to feel uncomfortable.

Whenever persons are expected or required to wear masks, masks may be removed when eating, drinking, singing, going outside, or playing a wind instrument. When masks are removed for these purposes, physical distancing of 6 feet or more should be maintained to the extent possible.

NYS aligns with the [CDC definition of close contact](#) in schools. In the school setting, with universal masking, a close contact was generally defined as less than 3 feet from an infected student, if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. **The exception allowing 3 feet of distance to determine exposure in schools does not apply to unmasked individuals**, nor does it apply to teachers, staff or other adults, regardless of masking. *This means that in settings where masks are not worn, anyone within a 6-foot radius of an infected person should be considered exposed.*

I. Notifications

To protect themselves and others and stop the spread of COVID-19 in the household and community, Green Chimneys will notify through either group- or individual-level contact tracing, any affected school staff, students, and their parents/guardians whenever an individual:

1. Was in the same room as an infected individual and so was exposed or potentially exposed (i.e., in the same classroom as an infected individual for longer than 15 minutes, or
2. Was identified as being exposed because they were a close contact of an infected individual.

Note: Group-level contract tracing (e.g., classroom, school bus), in Criterion 1 above, is expected to alleviate the need for most classic (individual) contact tracing in schools. Criterion 2 above can be used to reduce the number of students affected by masking/testing, and in some situations where there might have been exposures outside the classroom setting, such as non-classroom-based extracurricular activities.

NYSDOH recommends exposed or potentially exposed individuals follow [NYSDOH Isolation and Quarantine Guidance](#) for testing and masking.

II. Testing in a school setting with reduced mask usage

In the absence of a statewide masking requirement, COVID-19 testing remains a recommended public health strategy for surveillance and to identify infected individuals quickly so that they can isolate and avoid spreading COVID-19 further.

Whenever someone – a student, staff or teacher – is determined to have been exposed or potentially exposed, the individual should consider being tested for COVID-19 as follows:

- Immediately upon learning of the exposure or potential exposure,
- At least 5 days after the last date of exposure or potential exposure, regardless of vaccination status,
- If the individual is not fully vaccinated and attending or working at school after an exposure or potential exposure, frequent testing (e.g., daily, every other day, at least twice within 5 days) from the date of the exposure or potential exposure (Day 0) through at least Day 5 should be strongly considered and encouraged,
- If a test is positive exclude from school or work and/or exclude from school or work and test as soon as possible if symptoms develop,
- Exception: Individuals with lab-confirmed COVID-19 within the past 3 months do not need to get tested unless they develop symptoms.

Symptomatic individuals, regardless of vaccination status or recent infection, should stay home until tested and if positive or not tested, should isolate for 5 days, or until other criteria are met for school attendance (e.g., resolution of fever), whichever is longer. The [NYSDOH flow chart](#) addresses school attendance and requirements for children who have symptoms consistent with vaccine side effects shortly after receipt of the COVID-19 vaccine.

To ensure that all families can comply with recommended testing, Green Chimneys will conduct (with consent) the recommended testing when families express concerns about their ability to do the testing.

Green Chimneys will track testing, including at-home testing, and may choose to prioritize or limit tracking to cases in which testing compliance is of the greatest importance (e.g., higher risk exposures such as presence of someone with COVID-19 in the household, unvaccinated individuals, large clusters of cases).

Green Chimneys will remain current on its reporting of all COVID-19 test results that it conducts or that it becomes aware of, including results of home testing, to the New York State COVID-19 Report Card, in addition to their other reporting obligations under Public Health Law.

Exposed individuals, regardless of vaccination status, may remain in school or at work by appropriately wearing a well-fitting mask and undergoing recommended testing. Students may continue to participate in extracurricular activities. These individuals also may continue to ride the bus.

III. Exemption to weekly unvaccinated staff/teacher testing for recently recovered persons

The weekly testing requirement established in 10 NYCRR 2.62 remains in effect. Staff who were diagnosed with and recovered from COVID-19 within the past 3 months are not subject to the weekly testing requirement. Asymptomatic individuals exposed to COVID-19 who have been previously diagnosed with laboratory confirmed COVID-19, and have since recovered, are not required to retest and quarantine within 3 months after the date of symptom onset from the initial COVID-19 infection or date of first positive diagnostic test if asymptomatic during illness. Green Chimneys will keep track of when the 3 months is over, at which time the staff person should resume testing.

Under these regulations, local health officials are given the duty and accompanying discretion as to how the requirements will be enforced.

IV. School exclusion

Green Chimneys, along with the LHD will monitor mask wearing and track the use of recommended testing and may focus on activities at higher risk.

Some individuals may be medically unable to wear a mask. Green Chimneys along with the LHD may decide on a case-by-case basis whether these individuals should be excluded from school or work, or will be allowed to remain in school or at work if exposed or potentially exposed.

Examples of factors to consider include:

- The level of risk of the exposure (e.g., ongoing household exposure imposes a higher risk than exposure within 6 feet of distance or classroom exposure),
- The feasibility of conducting frequent testing (e.g., at least every other day) during the 5 days after exposure,
- Whether there are individuals in the classroom who are known to be at high risk for severe disease,
- The individual's vaccination status,
- Other mitigation measures in place (e.g., ventilation, distancing) and whether they can be strengthened or are already optimized,

- Circumstances of the student's learning and school attendance needs (e.g., cannot participate in remote instruction).

Green Chimneys will use other mitigation measures including improved ventilation, access to and encouragement of vaccination, surveillance testing, and access to free over the counter at-home test kits, as well as:

- Vigorous cleaning protocols
- Handwashing requirements
- Meetings larger than five persons (or in space that cannot allow for distancing) will continue to be held virtually and or outside when appropriate
- Continued use of ezSCRN, required for staff members to use daily at this time
- Daily screenings for any students who have been exposed for 10 days post-exposure by the nurse before entering the classroom
- Continued screening for visitors to Green Chimneys. Only essential visitors or resident family visitors are permitted; the campus remains closed to public visitors at this time

This guidance is in effect for all of Green Chimneys staff and students on all sites with the exception of CT adult services.

Additional school guidance can be found at:

https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2021/09/school-guidance_0.pdf

and

https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/03/school-guidance-faqs-for-schools_03.01.22.pdf