



# COUNTY OF ERIE

MARK C. POLONCARZ

COUNTY EXECUTIVE

GALE R. BURSTEIN, MD, MPH  
COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH

## Questions and Answers Guidance for P-12 Schools and Higher Education

The Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) developed its guidance for p-12 schools and higher education with two goals in mind:

1. keeping students and staff in these environments safe and healthy;
2. keeping schools and colleges open for learning.

### Are the ECDOH students and staff quarantine guidelines for school environments less strict or stricter than what is used for the general public?

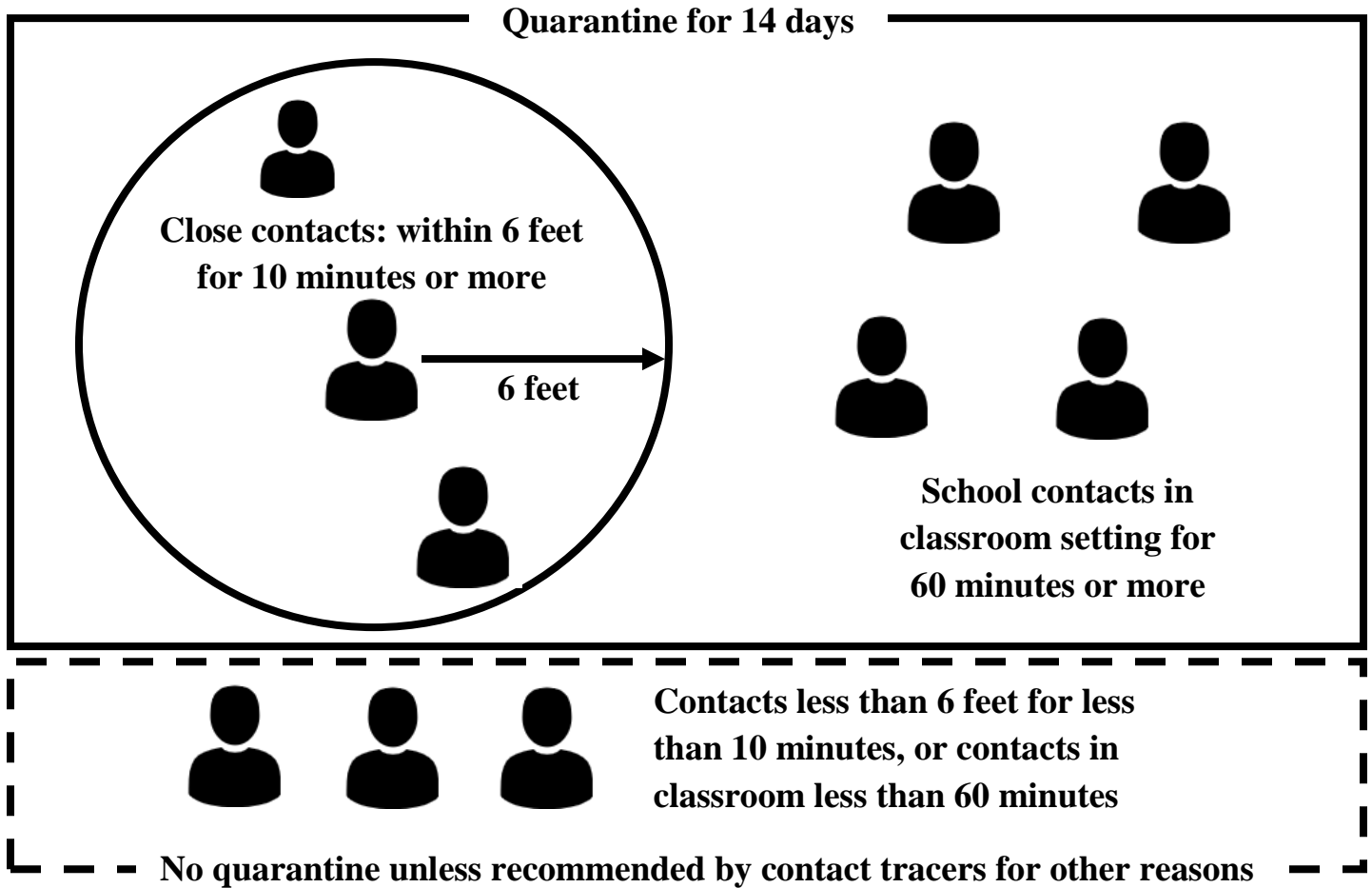
New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) *Close Contacts* are defined as individuals who are **within 6 feet** of a COVID case for at least **10 consecutive minutes** during a time the case was infectious – able to transmit an infection to others.

NYSDOH allows local health departments to use **duration of exposure, proximity, and presence of symptoms** to determine who is a contact from a school setting that should be placed in quarantine. For students and school staff in Erie County, ECDOH is defining **school contacts within 60 minutes** or more in **standard classroom settings** and contacts in rows and seats closest to case in large classroom (lecture hall) settings.

ECDOH school contact criteria will include more individuals than the NYSDOH “close contact” standard used for cases within the general public. For school contacts, ECDOH contact tracers will apply the criteria explained in our guidance document. That guidance includes that when individuals have been in a standard classroom setting for 60 minutes or more with a positive COVID case, they will also be placed in quarantine for 14 days. The physical measures and operational changes that schools and colleges have put in place – masks, distancing, scheduling, physical barriers – are all designed to **reduce risk. That risk is not eliminated.**

*continued*

## Graphic: School Setting Guidance



### **Do your contact tracers consider 60 consecutive minutes, or 60 cumulative minutes, for quarantine?**

Each case investigated by our contact tracers is unique. A baseline of 60 consecutive minutes serves as a starting point for our contact tracing team's risk exposure assessment. Total exposure time (cumulative) is still notable and is considered for purposes of quarantining contacts in a school setting.

### **If there is a COVID case at my school, who has to be quarantined, and for how long?**

ECDOH contact tracers conduct a case investigation for every positive COVID test result among Erie County residents. That investigation determines who has been in contact with an individual with COVID-19 during a time when they were infectious. Those contacts are notified and placed in quarantine for 14 days past the last date of exposure. *continued*

## **Will parents or staff be notified if there was a case in a classroom even if the exposure was less than 60 minutes?**

Schools and districts may decide to notify parents of a positive case in their child's classroom. Our department will make notifications to parents of students who are considered to be contacts to a COVID case. Parents may visit <https://schoolcovidreportcard.health.ny.gov> for data about COVID cases in their school or district.

## **My child has/I have been placed in quarantine. Do I need a COVID-19 test?**

For those placed in quarantine after a COVID-19 exposure, a test is strongly recommended but not required. ECDOH free diagnostic test sites, currently offered three times a week, are a testing option and results may take 3-5 days to be available. Call (716) 858-2929 to schedule a diagnostic test through our regular sample collection sites. For other COVID testing options in the community, visit [www.erie.gov/covidtestsites](http://www.erie.gov/covidtestsites).

## **If my child is/I am placed in quarantine, and have a negative COVID test, why can't I return to school immediately?**

COVID-19 incubation period is 14 days. People exposed to COVID 19 could develop a positive test anytime during that 14 days after exposure. For example, a negative COVID-19 test result on day #5 after exposure does not assure that the contact will remain negative during the remainder of those 14 days. The 14-day quarantine period is designed to break the chain of community transmission and limit the number of people exposed to illness.

## **If one child has to quarantine due to an exposure, can his/her siblings remain in school?**

Siblings and other household members of an individual who has been placed in quarantine may continue their normal activities, including school and work. Individuals in quarantine should remain alone in one room of the house with the door closed, with a separate bathroom if possible, along with following recommendations that a contact tracer will provide.

## **What happens if my child/I cannot safely isolate or quarantine in our home?**

When an individual is placed in isolation or quarantine, our contact tracers will interview them to ask about their ability to safely isolate or quarantine. If there are circumstances that make that impossible, contact tracers can offer resources to assist.

*continued*

## **Why is the quarantine guidance for schools different than guidance for the general public?**

School settings are different than business settings and therefore “within 6 feet for 10 consecutive minutes” would produce a higher level of risk to staff and students. The two settings are different for a variety of reasons, including:

- schools are larger and more densely populated;
- there are more people per room;
- there is a range of hygiene abilities;
- 6 feet may not be adequate (recent science questions 6 feet as enough and transmission risk remains);
- students and parents may have difficulty with recall;
- teachers are moving through the classroom during periods and coming in close contact with students repeatedly;
- students and staff do not always mask properly.

ECDOH also took larger factors into consideration, such as Erie County’s higher infection rate compared to other NYS counties, and the number of school districts within the county. Our guidelines are conservative and promote safety. Setting an objective standard allows us to protect public health, assist our contact tracers and help keep schools open.

ECDOH school guidance and this Question and Answer document may be updated as we receive new directives from NYSDOH. Visit [www.erie.gov/covid19/schools](http://www.erie.gov/covid19/schools).

Questions about your school’s policies related to physical distancing, masks, or scheduling policies should be directed to your school principal or superintendent.

Questions about your child’s health should be directed to your child’s physician.

If you have been contacted by the Erie County Department of Health to be placed in isolation or quarantine, please call the number that the contact tracer provided to you.

Revised 10/7/2020