



Northeast District Department of Health

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MEMO

To: NDDH Board Members and Medical Advisor, Town Officials, School Superintendents & Nurses, Public Health System Partners, Parents, and Community-at-Large
From: Sue Starkey, MPH, MS, RD, Director of Health
Date: Sunday, August 2, 2020
RE: **Community Response to COVID-19**

The Northeast District Department of Health (NDDH) is alerting the community that there has been a marked increase in the transmission of COVID-19 among adolescents in northeast CT. Between July 23rd and 31st there were 20 laboratory confirmed cases of COVID-19 among 16 to 19-year-olds compared to 13 cases in the four prior months. Through our case and contact investigations, we were able to link some cases to a multi-day, out-of-state gathering held in mid-July. We also determined that many parents and officials were aware of the gathering and the ongoing disease transmission even before laboratory results were received by NDDH. Community partners are encouraged to report such information to NDDH so we can, in turn, alert health care providers to use when evaluating patients. Timely sharing of relevant information is essential to disease control. In addition to alerting health care, elected, and school officials, NDDH is alerting the general public to the ongoing and elevated risk as well as the importance of taking all precautions and following “the Rules” to protect themselves and others. The Rules include guidance and directives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Connecticut Department of Public Health (CT DPH) and other state agencies, the Governor, and local town and public health officials. As many as 40% of COVID cases can be asymptomatic so you may not know if you are in the company of someone who is sick until it is too late. NDDH is sharing this important update with you and proposing specific steps be taken by community partners to prevent further spread of the disease.

IMPROVING THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

FORMAL REPORTING: CT LAWS AND REGULATIONS

- COVID-19 is a reportable disease in the State of Connecticut. CT health care providers and laboratories are required to report these diseases to the CT DPH and their local health department.
- Reportable diseases are entered into the Connecticut Electronic Disease Surveillance System (CTEDSS) which is maintained by the CT Department of Public Health (DPH). Positive COVID-19 cases are then entered into [ContaCT – Connecticut’s Contact Tracing Platform](#).
- The NDDH Public Health Nurse monitors CTEDSS and ContaCT daily and conducts investigations on these cases.

INFORMAL REPORTING

- In addition to the mandatory reporting systems, we rely on health care providers, elected officials, and concerned citizens as to alert us when they identify *conditions* that may impact the health of the community. NDDH may also learn about conditions in the community through news reports, social media, and events.

CALL TO ACTION

Make sure that NDDH is *on your list* to report an unusual occurrence of disease (e.g., when an unusual number of students present within the same time frame with similar symptoms.) Contact NDDH at 860-774-7350 and ask for the Public Health Nurse.

CONTACT TRACING

[Contact tracing](#) is a long-standing public health practice to prevent the spread of diseases like COVID-19. We identify people who are positive and people who they came in contact with to be sure they know how to take care of themselves and protect others. Contact tracing will be conducted for [close contacts](#) of **laboratory-confirmed or probable COVID-19 patients**. Our investigative work relies on the efficient exchange of accurate information. Our goal is to reach everyone within 48 hours. Delays may result in further spread of the disease.

CALL TO ACTION — For contact tracing to be successful, *answer the phone when we call*, and then answer our questions truthfully and accurately.

PROTECTED INFORMATION

Private health information is protected by Connecticut General Statutes. NDDH and the CT DPH will keep all information obtained during investigations private. During contact investigations, the sick person's identity is not disclosed. Any potentially infected contacts are asked about symptoms, testing and other questions without saying who may have transmitted the virus to them. *We take our responsibility to protect privacy as seriously as we take our responsibility to protect public health.*

WHO is at risk for being infected with COVID-19?

Anyone who is within 6 feet of a person who has COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes.

HOW DO WE PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19?

MONITOR FOR SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

One of the most important things you can do is monitor everyone in your house for symptoms.

[Symptoms](#) may appear **2-14 days after exposure to the virus**. **If symptoms develop, isolate the sick person from others and contact your healthcare provider.** This list will be updated as more is learned about COVID-19:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

[10 Things you can do to manage your COVID-19 symptoms at home](#)

CALL TO ACTION — Start tracking your symptoms *now*. Do you have allergy symptoms that could be mistaken for COVID-19? Are you tired every day? Are you taking certain medications that produce COVID-19-like side effects? What is your typical temperature? Knowing your baseline health will help you to recognize *new* symptoms that might be COVID-19. This information will help you and your health care provider and school nurse make more accurate determinations about your risk.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE HAS SYMPTOMS

For community, employees, school teachers and staff showing symptoms of COVID-19, [CDC recommendations](#) include separating yourself from others, contacting a healthcare provider, and staying home for 10 days and at least 24 hours with no fever, and symptoms have improved.

For students, recent [CDC guidance for screening K-12 students for symptoms of COVID-19](#) suggests adhering to existing school illness management policies.

TESTING

[Testing](#) is recommended for all close contacts of confirmed or probable COVID-19 patients.

WHO NEEDS TO QUARANTINE? (Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.)

- Anyone who has been in **close contact with someone who has COVID-19** needs to quarantine. This includes people who previously had COVID-19 and people who have taken an antibody test and have antibodies to the virus.

WHAT COUNTS AS CLOSE CONTACTS?

- Being within-6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to positive specimen collection) until the time the patient was isolated.
- You provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19
- You had direct physical contact with the person (touched, hugged, or kissed them)
- You shared eating or drinking utensils
- They sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on you

STEPS TO TAKE TO QUARANTINE: Stay home and monitor your health

- **Stay home for 14 days** after your last contact with a person who has COVID-19
- Watch for fever (100.4°F), cough, shortness of breath, or [other symptoms](#) of COVID-19
- If possible, stay away others, especially people who are at [higher risk](#) for getting very sick from COVID-19 (parents, grandparents, those with underlying health conditions, etc.)

WHO NEEDS TO ISOLATE? (Isolation separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick.)

- People who have symptoms of COVID-19 and are able to recover at home
- People who have no symptoms (are asymptomatic) but have tested positive for infection with SARS-CoV-2

WHEN DOES ISOLATION END?

If you think or KNOW YOU HAD COVID-19 and you HAD symptoms, you can be with others after:

- At least 10 days since symptoms first appeared **and**
- At least 24 hours with no fever without fever-reducing medication **and**
- Symptoms have improved
- Other medical conditions may require you to isolate longer. Talk to your healthcare provider.

If you TESTED POSITIVE for COVID-19 but had NO SYMPTOMS (asymptomatic)

If you *continue* to have no symptoms, you can be with others after:

- 10 days have passed since the date you had your positive test

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN IN OUR COMMUNITY?

Like it has happened in communities across the country and around the globe. Numbers have been “low” in northeast CT, so some people have let down their guard. They are drawn into complacency or boredom. They don’t wear their masks or they wear them incorrectly. They don’t carefully follow the Rules and the effective strategies listed below.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE RISK

To reduce risk and prevent a resurgence of COVID-19, **EVERYONE NEEDS TO DO THE FOLLOWING:**

- When in public, wear a cloth face covering over your nose and mouth.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from other people.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Do not touch your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue. Throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Stay home when you are sick except to get medical care.
- Get your annual flu shot when it becomes available.
- People 65 and over and those of any age with underlying medical conditions should stay safe and stay home.
- Distance yourself from any places or situations where people are not following the Rules or you do not feel safe from COVID-19.

SCHOOL REOPENING INDICATORS

The CT DPH and Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) have already defined the thresholds for school models and released [Interim Guidance for Decision-Making \(Addendum 4\)](#) on July 30, 2020. The data that is needed to make decisions by which the models apply is expected to be released by the CT DPH for use by local health departments and school systems.

CT DPH and NDDH will provide information on background levels of disease. School Boards must take many other factors into consideration as they make decisions about their model in meeting the requirements of the CSDE. These considerations include facility capacity, ventilation, personnel, bus companies, and input from finance committees on budgets, among many others.

In March, NDDH worked with the schools and a decision was made to close them slightly ahead of the rest of the State. This is one of the reasons why Covid-19 incidence was kept under control. It is not a coincidence that Connecticut reopened, outdoors events were allowed, young adults have found ways to gather after enduring a long period of social isolation, and predictably, young people began to be infected. I suspect that gatherings with school-age children—specifically reopening schools—is likely to result in higher levels of disease transmission.

This situation is rapidly evolving, and recommendations may change frequently as new information becomes available. NDDH will send updates of local importance as they arise. We recommend the CDC, CT DPH, and agency sites specific to your decision-making ([CT State Department of Education](#), [CT Department of Economic and Development](#), etc.) as reliable sources of up-to-date information:

[CT Coronavirus Website](#)

[CDC Coronavirus Website](#)

[General Business FAQs](#) – includes answers on suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the workplace

“This is a virus that can spread rapidly. A small cluster of cases can turn into hundreds of new infections within days. If you multiply that, we are looking at major impact to our ability to continue to reopen our economy or even send children back to school in September for in-person instruction.”

- Governor Ned Lamont, [Jul 28, 2020 Press Release](#)

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