



Pearl River School District

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Marco F. Pochintesta, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

November 2, 2020

Dear Pearl River School District Parents,

I know that we are all going through a very difficult time with the pandemic still having an impact on community health and on the way we live. One of the most difficult issues we have faced since the return to school and the challenge of re-opening is the imposition of quarantines on students and staff that have been determined to be exposed. A number of questions have arisen regarding the process of quarantining and I want to address some of these questions.

When the District receives notification of a student or staff member testing positive for COVID-19, our responsibility is to gather information regarding who was potentially exposed during the course of the school day or during our after-school activities. This information includes all classes, lunch period, the bus, and any other school activities.

The District's next step in the process is to report the case to the Rockland County Department of Health (RCDOH). We review the individual schedule of the COVID positive student or staff member, including the physical layout of the classes or rooms that the infected individual was in. The RCDOH asks clarifying questions and then tells us who has to quarantine. The RCDOH is the authority for deciding who has to quarantine and who does not.

The Department of Health considers a person to be infectious two days prior to symptom onset, or two days before the individual went to take a COVID-19 test if he/she is asymptomatic. For example, if a student develops a low-grade fever on Wednesday, and receives a positive result on Friday, then everyone the student was in contact with on Monday and Tuesday was potentially exposed.

As a result of who has to quarantine, the District has the responsibility of determining whether a school will continue in-person learning. This decision may be based upon staffing. If a large number of staff in a school are required to quarantine and we do not have enough staff to cover classes for in-person learning, then the school must move to a remote learning model. The decision may also be based upon the number of positive cases in the building. Since students are able to remain in a cohort at the elementary level, a positive case will typically not affect another class. At the high school level, a greater number of students are affected because students mix each period due to having different courses and electives.

Parents have asked why it is necessary for large numbers of students to quarantine if we are maintaining students 6 feet apart and we are wearing masks all day. The information on the attached page issued by the NYS Department of Health describes "close contact" and "proximate contact". Proximate contact is defined as "being in the same enclosed environment such as a classroom, office, or gatherings but greater than 6 ft. from a person displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or someone who has tested positive for COVID-19." The

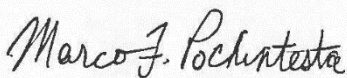
document further states that “precautionary quarantine is required for a person who ... had proximate exposure to a positive person.” Once again, the Department of Health informs us who must quarantine after a positive case in one of our schools.

Each case of COVID-19 is evaluated by the building and District administration to determine how we can do things better in order to minimize exposure. An example of this is the PRHS lunch periods. Even though students are seated six feet apart in the cafeteria, both high school cases required that everyone who was in the cafeteria and those seated outside to quarantine due to being in proximate contact with an individual who tested positive. This resulted in a large number of faculty and staff needing to quarantine. The HS has developed a plan to divide larger groups of students and staff into “pods” during lunch periods. This should reduce the number of staff and students that would need to quarantine in the event of another positive case. There are not enough open classrooms to allow students to eat in classrooms in small groups during the lunch periods because the classrooms are being used for instruction throughout the day.

Some parents have asked when the next phase of the plan will be implemented. As soon as NYS changes the guidelines for the reopening of schools, we will be prepared to adapt to whatever new opportunities are available to us. Currently the requirement for social distancing prevents us from being able to return fully. I am certain that I speak for everyone in the PRSD community in stating that we look forward to having all of our students back in school. We all care deeply for our students, their happiness, their health and well-being, as well as their intellectual growth.

I hope this clarifies some of the questions that you may have. We will continue to communicate with our school community any updates related to the impact of COVID-19 to our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marco J. Pochini". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned on a light gray rectangular background.



Guidance on the Contacts of a Close or Proximate Contact of a Confirmed or Suspected Case of COVID-19

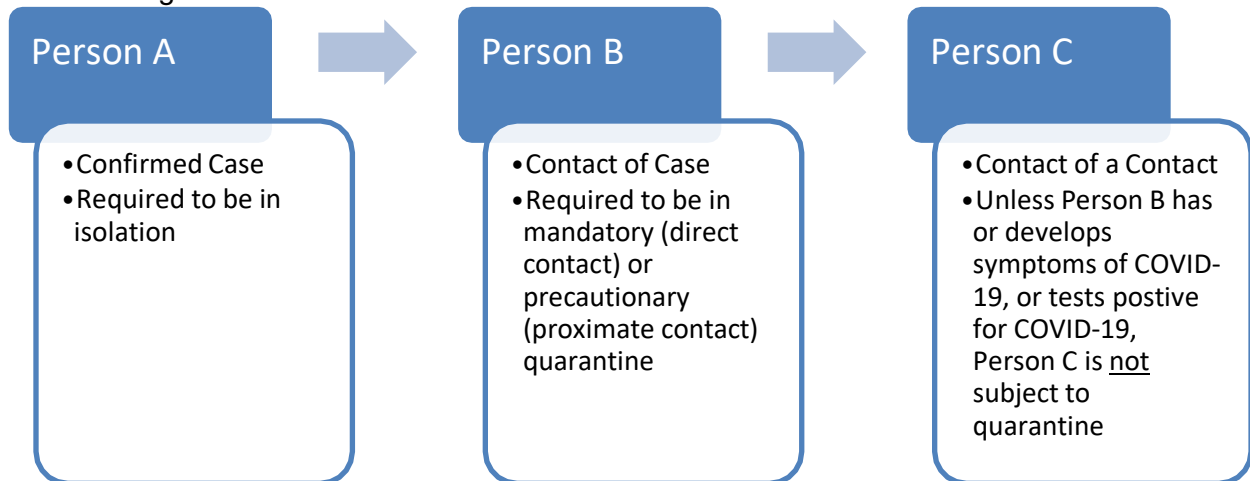
Background

As more cases of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) are identified or suspected across New York State, and individuals and families are required or recommended for mandatory or precautionary quarantine, it is important that there is a common understanding of the risk to contacts of contacts of a suspected or confirmed case.

DOH Policy Guidance

Person A is diagnosed with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19. If Person B had contact, close¹ or proximate², with Person A, Person B would be subject to mandatory quarantine³ (if close contact) or precautionary quarantine⁴ (if proximate contact).

Any individual (Person C) who is a contact of Person B (i.e. spouse, children, co-workers, etc.) is considered a “contact of a contact”. Person C is not at risk for infection and would not be subject to quarantine unless Person B had or developed symptoms, or tested positive for the virus causing COVID-19.



¹ Close contact is defined as “being within 6 ft of a person displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or someone who has tested positive of COVID-19”

² Proximate contact is defined as “being in the same enclosed environment such as a classroom, office, or gatherings but greater than 6 ft from a person displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or someone who has tested positive for COVID-19”

³ Mandatory quarantine is required for a person who “has been in close contact (6 ft.) with someone who is positive, but is not displaying symptoms for COVID-19; or person has traveled to China, Iran, Japan, South Korea or Italy and is displaying symptoms of COVID-19”

⁴ Precautionary quarantine is required for a person who “meets one or more of the following criteria: (i) has traveled to China, Iran, Japan, South Korea or Italy while COVID-19 was prevalent, but is not displaying symptoms; or (ii) is known to have had a proximate exposure to a positive person but has not had direct contact with a positive person and is not displaying symptoms”