

SCHOOLS REOPENING



James P. McCoy/Buffalo News

Superintendents learned Monday that schools are not responsible for testing students.

Health officials offer guidance to schools on testing, reopening

BY BARBARA O'BRIEN
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Children make up 8% of all of those who have tested positive for Covid-19 in Erie County, but school superintendents learned Monday that the schools are not responsible for testing students.

"Schools are not in charge of testing," Erie County Health Commissioner Dr. Gale R. Burstein said. "They are in charge of teaching."



Dr. Gale Burstein

Children make up 20% of the population in Erie County.

Burstein said hundreds of thousands of adults have been tested – many without symptoms – but few children take the tests, and most often children have symptoms. Because the number getting tested is so low, the rate is not reflective of the population, she said.

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James P. McCoy/Buffalo News

Superintendents are making final plans to start classes this fall, with many selecting a hybrid model where students would spend two or three days in school each week.

CDC doesn't recommend mass testing for schools to reopen

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In Erie County, 710 people who are 19 or younger have tested positive, according to the Health Department, making up 8.1% of all positive tests.

Across New York State, 11 people 19 or younger have died due to the virus.

School superintendents are making final plans to start classes this fall, with many selecting a hybrid model where students would spend two or three days in school each week.

Superintendents in Erie and Niagara counties got some answers from their top health officials Monday on what responsibility they have in testing children when they return to school.

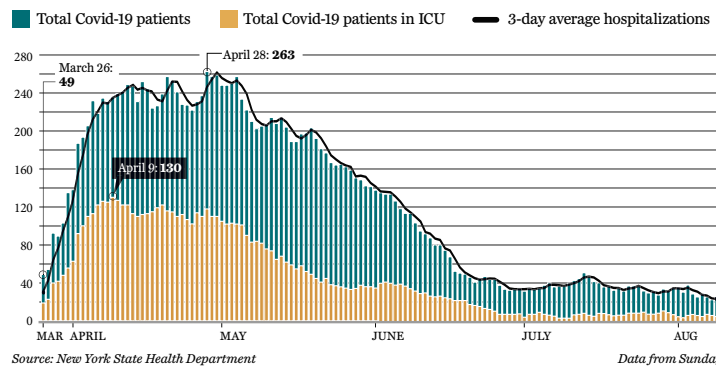
Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo told school districts last week that they had to post their plans for testing and contact tracing for the school year clearly on their websites as a condition to reopen schools shuttered due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some superintendents wondered if they would have to identify who needs to be tested and figure out how to do that.

Burstein and Niagara County Public Health Director Daniel J. Stapleton met in separate meetings with superintendents in their counties Monday and told them health officials will conduct contact tracing and notify students and staff who need to be tested for the virus.

Stapleton said superintendents need to have a plan for what they will do when a stu-

Tracking Covid-19 hospitalization rates

As schools prepare to reopen, superintendents learned Monday that 710 people 19 or younger have tested positive for Covid-19 in Erie County, 8.1% of all positive tests.



Covid-19 in WNY*

Number of confirmed cases: **11,406**
 Number of deaths: **849**

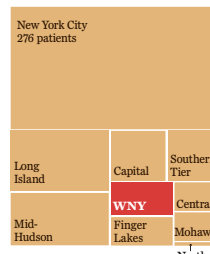
Cases by county

• Erie County	8,767
• Niagara	1,497
• Orleans	282
• Genesee	266
• Chautauqua	261
• Cattaraugus	135
• Wyoming	114
• Allegany	84

* Updated on Monday

Total Covid-19 patients hospitalized in NYS

Western New York*
24 Patients

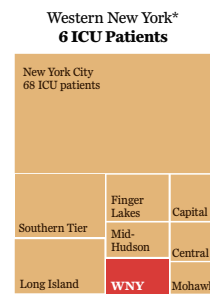


Updated Monday

* Western New York includes Erie, Niagara counties, Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua counties

Total Covid-19 patients in ICU in NYS

Western New York*
6 ICU Patients



Updated Monday

New infections in WNY

1.0% % Positive tests per day (7 day rolling average)

3.88 New cases per 100K (7 day rolling average)

Updated Monday

dent comes down with symptoms in school.

"Because you will get them. I think that is not debatable," he said. "The key is consistency across the county in all the school districts."

Stapleton said the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not recommend mass testing of students and staff to start up school.

But schools will have an important responsibility once a positive case is identified and the county starts to trace the person's contacts.

Burstein said the Erie County Health Department will work with one person in each school and give them the name of the person who tested positive.

That confidential information cannot be shared, but it can be used to help identify people who came within 6 feet of the person for more than 10 minutes when they were infectious, she said.

That would mean keeping track of who was in the classroom throughout the day, including students and teachers; if they wore masks; and if hand sanitizer was available, Stapleton said.

"We determine who might have been in close contact and who we recommend testing for, and who we would not recommend testing for," he said.

Those children or staff who were in close contact with an infected person will be advised they have been exposed, told they are under quarantine and where they can obtain a diagnostic test.

Some clinics offer free tests;

others take health insurance to cover the cost.

"The Health Department is in the business to contact trace. That's a bread-and-butter function we have done before Covid-19," Burstein said.

"If you're not notified by the Health Department, you're not at risk."

The school could inform parents there has been a positive case without providing specific information about the person, she said.

Burstein and Stapleton said it will primarily be up to superintendents to decide if a school should be closed after someone tests positive.

"It's a superintendent's decision to close schools. I can't close schools unless there's an imminent public health threat," Stapleton said.

But he said the Health Department can talk with school districts about "numbers that work for them," that include absentee rates for students and faculty, and infection rates in the school and region.

"When you get to a certain number, you look at if you're being effective in your role as an educator," he said.

Lewiston-Porter Superintendent Paul Casseri said several Niagara County superintendents will work with the Health Department on a flow chart for what happens in the event of a positive case that districts could add to their reopening plans.

"The frustrating piece is in the original guidance document that wasn't our responsibility," he said.

News Staff Reporter Jay Rey contributed to this story.