



Department
of Health

COVID-19 Micro-Cluster Strategy: Red, Orange and Yellow Zone Testing in Schools

December 14, 2020

Red and Orange Zone Testing Guidance



Department
of Health

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Interim Guidance on COVID-19 Testing Requirements for Public and Non-Public Schools Located in Areas Designated as "Red" or "Orange" Cluster Zones Under the New York State Cluster Action Initiative

*Updated December 4, 2020,
Originally Issued November 3, 2020*

Background

After more than 8 months of strict adherence to data-driven, evidence-based protocols, including required social distancing and mandatory face coverings, and strategic, phased-in reopening after the pause of our economy, New Yorkers have successfully reduced the spread of COVID-19 to one of the lowest rates in the nation.

However, as certain areas of the State continue to see an increase in COVID-19 cases and test positivity, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo implemented the [cluster action initiative](#) to address COVID-19 hot spots as they occur. This science-based approach focuses on addressing clusters of cases and aims to prevent further community-wide transmission of the virus, and includes new rules and restrictions directly targeted to areas with the highest concentration of COVID-19 cases and surrounding communities. The initiative divides clusters and the areas around them into three categories – the cluster itself (red zone), a warning zone (orange zone), and a precautionary zone (yellow zone). Areas can also become a zone based upon metrics established by New York State Department of Health (DOH).

New York State recognizes that safely keeping pre-kindergarten through grade 12 schools open for in-person instruction is critical to student success and parent stability. In alignment with international and national experts, the State is committed to allowing schools to remain open as long as a school's infection rate is under control and remains under the infection rate of the community at large, particularly for younger students (i.e., Pre-K to Grade 8). In fact, schools have reported nearly 500,000 test results of students, faculty, and staff since September with approximately 13,000 on-site positive cases, yielding a low positivity rate of 2.6%.

Under the authority of [Executive Order 202.79](#), schools in red and orange zones must adhere to strict health guidelines, as detailed herein, to keep schools in focus areas safely open to in-person instruction. The guidelines require daily symptom and exposure screening, as well as testing of in-person students, faculty and staff.

Interim guidance updated on December 4, 2020

- Schools no longer required to close in-person instruction following a micro-cluster red or orange zone designation. Schools in these zones may remain open for in-person instruction, subject to strict adherence to this guidance and any directives issued by DOH.
- Schools are no longer required to submit a line list.



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Schools in a Red Zone

- If designated as a Red Zone, a total of **30%** of the in-person students, faculty and staff must be tested for COVID-19 over the one-month period following the zone designation.
- The numbers tested should be proportionately spread across the month with **15%** to be tested biweekly.

Red Zone Information

Schools in a Red Zone that are open to in-person or hybrid instruction must test a total of 30% of on-site students, faculty and staff for COVID-19 over the 1-month period following the zone designation. The testing must be proportionately spread across the month, with 15% of the on-site school population tested bi-weekly.

1) Is your school open to in-person or hybrid instruction?

Yes

No

2) Has your school started testing?

Yes

No

3) If applicable, enter the dates that your school closed in-person instruction and include when it reopened.

The date school closed

The date school reopened

mm/dd/yyyy



mm/dd/yyyy



4) Report the total number of unique students, teachers, and staff who attended school on-site at any point during the past 2 weeks. Each student, teacher, or staff member should only be counted once.

0

5) Report the total number of students, teachers, and staff who were tested for COVID-19 since you last reported.

Total number tested

Percentage tested

0

0

6) Report the total number of students, teachers, and staff whose test results were POSITIVE for COVID-19 since you last reported.

Test results not yet known

Test results confirmed positive

Preliminary school positivity

0

0

0

7) Is your school currently complying with the testing requirements described [here](#)?

Yes

No



Schools in an Orange Zone

- If designated as an Orange Zone, a total of **20%** of the in-person students, faculty and staff must be tested for COVID-19 over the one-month period following the zone designation.
- The numbers tested should be proportionately spread across the month with **10%** to be tested biweekly.

Orange Zone Information

Schools in an Orange Zone that are open to in-person or hybrid instruction must test a total of 20% of on-site students, faculty and staff for COVID-19 over the 1-month period following the zone designation. The testing must be proportionately spread across the month, with 10% of the on-site school population tested bi-weekly.

1) Is your school open to in-person or hybrid instruction?

2) Has your school started testing?

3) If applicable, enter the dates that your school closed in-person instruction and include when it reopened.

The date school closed

The date school reopened

4) Report the total number of unique students, teachers, and staff who attended school on-site at any point during the past 2 weeks. Each student, teacher, or staff member should only be counted once.

5) Report the total number of students, teachers, and staff who were tested for COVID-19 since you last reported.

Total number tested

Percentage tested

6) Report the total number of students, teachers, and staff whose test results were POSITIVE for COVID-19 since you last reported.

Test results not yet known

Test results confirmed positive

Preliminary school positivity

7) Is your school currently complying with the testing requirements described [here](#)?



Closure Metrics

- The school will be required to close in-person instruction if the random sampling generates:
 - 9 or more positive cases in any school, *or*
 - if for a sample size of more than 300 weekly tests, achieves a positivity rate of 2% or higher (6 cases or more depending on sample size) in New York City,
 - *or* 3% (9 or more cases depending on sample size) outside of New York City, of one such discrete sample.

Yellow Zone Guidance



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Interim Guidance on Mandatory COVID-19 Testing in Public and Non-Public Schools Located in Areas Designated as "Yellow Zones" Under the New York State Cluster Action Initiative

October 9, 2020

Background

After more than 7 months of strict adherence to data-driven, evidence-based protocols, including required social distancing and mandatory face coverings, and after the pause of our economic engine, New Yorkers have successfully reduced the spread of COVID-19 to one of the lowest rates in the nation. While New York has continued this positive trajectory, other states that have taken a less cautious approach are now experiencing rapidly increasing rates of transmission of this deadly virus.

At the end of September, certain areas of the State have seen an increase in COVID-19 cases and test positivity in areas in New York State. The State has deployed rapid testing machines to specific counties throughout the state that are experiencing this uptick and seeing this cluster activity. On October 6, 2020, Governor Cuomo implemented a new cluster action initiative to address COVID-19 hot spots that have cropped up in Brooklyn and Queens, and in Broome, Orange, and Rockland Counties. This science-based approach will focus on addressing these clusters and aims to prevent further transmission of the virus, and includes new rules and restrictions directly targeted to areas with the highest concentration of COVID-19 cases and surrounding communities. The initiative divides clusters and the areas around them into three categories – the cluster itself (red zone), a warning zone (orange zone), and a precautionary zone (yellow zone).

Under the authority of E.O. 202.68, schools in red and orange zone must close in-person instruction for at least two weeks. Furthermore, schools open to in-person instruction in yellow zones are required to conduct random surveillance testing for a portion of their in-person students, staff, and teachers at least once a week, subject to NYS Department of Health (NYS DOH) guidance as stated herein, for the entirety of time the school remains in a yellow zone. School districts conducting its entirely remote operations must continue plans to ensure the availability of meals.

Testing Requirements for Schools in Yellow Zones

The NYS DOH has determined that schools open to in-person instruction in yellow zones are required to test 20% of in-person students, teachers and staff, at least once a week starting Friday October 16, 2020, for as long as the school remains in a designated yellow zone.



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ADDENDUM to Interim Guidance on Mandatory COVID-19 Testing in Public and Non-Public Schools Located in Areas Designated as "Yellow Zones" Under the New York State Cluster Action Initiative October 9, 2020 Update: November 12, 2020

Pursuant to the *Interim Guidance on Mandatory COVID-19 Testing in Public and Non-Public Schools Located in Areas Designated as "Yellow Zones" Under the New York State Cluster Action Initiative*, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has determined that schools open to in-person instruction in yellow zones are required to test 20% of in-person students, teachers and staff, at least once a week for as long as the school remains in a designated yellow zone.

NYSDOH is continuing to provide rapid testing kits for the virus that causes COVID-19 to local health departments (LHDs), hospitals, pharmacies, and other health care providers at no cost so long as testing is open to the public, offered free of charge, and prioritizes vulnerable and at-risk populations that may not currently have equitable access to testing.

Schools, particularly those in a yellow zone, should contact their LHDs, and other local health care partners to establish partnerships and make arrangements for deployment of these tests in their school setting to facilitate the required testing of students, teachers, and staff attending in-person. To find a partner who has a limited service laboratory (LSL), you can visit this website: <https://www.wadsworth.org/regulatory/clplimited-service-labs>. Additionally, the Department can assist with partnering a school with a community partner and schools should contact SchoolQuestionsCOVID@health.ny.gov if they are interested.

To be eligible for the free testing, schools must be current with their daily reporting as required under E.O. 202.61. LHDs have been advised to request enough testing resources to support weekly testing of 20% of the in-person student, staff, and teacher population within the yellow zone in their area for as long as such schools remains in the yellow zone. LHDs may also have the test kits sent directly to the partnering provider(s).

Any individual who takes the required training can conduct the rapid testing provided by the NYSDOH as long as they are affiliated with an LSL. Training is through a series of videos and takes a total of less than 3 hours. The LSL is required to upload test results in the Electronic Clinical Lab Reporting System (ECLRS). The Department has a



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ADDITIONAL ADDENDUM to Interim Guidance on Mandatory COVID-19 Testing in Public and Non-Public Schools Located in Areas Designated as "Yellow Zones" Under the New York State Cluster Action Initiative October 9, 2020 Update: November 12, 2020 Update: November 14, 2020

Pursuant to the *Interim Guidance on Mandatory COVID-19 Testing in Public and Non-Public Schools Located in Areas Designated as "Yellow Zones" Under the New York State Cluster Action Initiative*, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has determined that schools open to in-person instruction in yellow zones are required to test 20% of in-person students, teachers and staff, at least once a week for as long as the school remains in a designated yellow zone.

Geographic areas are designated as *yellow precautionary zones* due to increased viral spread, as demonstrated by increased new cases, positivity, hospital admissions, and other factors, or as *yellow buffer zones* that are adjacent to red or orange zones.

UPDATE: Effective the week of November 16, 2020, schools in yellow zones must test 20% of in-person students, faculty and staff over the two-week period immediately following the announcement of a yellow zone designation. If the results of the testing reveal that the positivity rate among the 20% of those tested is lower than the yellow zone's current 7-day positivity rate, testing at that school will no longer be required to continue. A positivity rate in a school that is lower than in the yellow zone is a sufficient demonstration that in-person instruction is not a significant driver of local viral spread. The current positivity rate for zones can be found at, <https://forward.ny.gov/percentage-positive-results-county-dashboard>.

However, if the results of the testing over the first two weeks reveal that the positivity rate among in-person student, staff and faculty is higher than the Yellow Zone's current 7-day positivity rate, the school will be required to continue to test 20% of the in-person population on a bi-weekly basis.

NYSDOH is amending the existing yellow zone testing requirement due to continued review of positivity rates within school settings. Continued activities include daily school survey submissions of COVID-19 cases by schools, a daily update of the public facing School Dashboard, and laboratory reporting of all COVID-19 test results to the Department of Health. Laboratory data on COVID-19 test results for New York State residents 5-17 years of age is matched to the school district within which an individual resides. This data reflects the number of COVID-19 tests and test results for students living in a school district. Overall, the positivity rates within school settings have remained low to date. This is most

No changes to yellow zone guidance.



Yellow Zone Testing Requirements

- Geographic areas are designated as yellow precautionary zones due to increased viral spread, as demonstrated by increased new cases, positivity, hospital admissions, and other factors, or as yellow buffer zones that are adjacent to red or orange zones.
- **Effective the week of November 16, 2020:** schools in yellow zones must test 20% of in-person students, faculty and staff over the two-week period immediately following the announcement of a yellow zone designation.
 - If the results of the testing reveal that the positivity rate among the 20% of those tested is lower than the yellow zone's current 7-day positivity rate, testing at that school will no longer be required to continue. A positivity rate in a school that is lower than in the yellow zone is a sufficient demonstration that in-person instruction is not a significant driver of local viral spread.
 - However, if the results of the testing over the first two weeks reveal that the positivity rate among in-person student, staff and faculty is higher than the Yellow Zone's current 7-day positivity rate, the school will be required to continue to test 20% of the in-person population on a bi-weekly basis.

Yellow Zone Information

Schools in a designated Yellow Zone are required to test 20% of the on-site school community (including students, faculty and staff) for COVID-19 over the two-week period immediately following the announcement of a Yellow Zone designation. If the results of testing over the first two weeks reveal that the school positivity rate is higher than the Yellow Zone's current 7-day positivity rate, the school will be required to continue to test 20% of the on-site population on a bi-weekly basis.

If the results of the testing reveal that the positivity rate among the 20% of those tested is lower (or equal to) the Yellow Zone's current 7-day positivity rate, testing at that school will no longer be required to continue.

1) Has your school met the 20% testing requirement (a) since your area was designated as a Yellow Zone, or (b) in the 2 weeks since you last reported (if applicable)?

Yes

No

Not Applicable

School has been providing Remote Only instruction for 14 days since being in the Yellow Zone

2) Enter the date that your school achieved the 20% testing requirement

3) Report the total number of unique students, teachers, and staff who attended school on-site at any point during the past 2 weeks. Each student, teacher, or staff member should only be counted once.

0

4) Report the total number of students, teachers, and staff who were tested for COVID-19 since a) your school was designated a yellow zone, OR b) in the 2 weeks since you last reported (if applicable).

Total number tested

0

Percentage tested

0

Test results not yet known

0

Test results confirmed positive

0

Preliminary school positivity

0

If some test results are not known, you must submit the outstanding test results via the Survey Change Request Form.

If the results of testing reveal that the school positivity rate is higher than the Yellow Zone's current 7-day positivity rate, the school will be required to continue to test 20% of the on-site population on a bi-weekly basis.

Testing Options

To ensure that students, faculty and staff have been tested for COVID-19, schools have the following options:

- Schools can accept written test results from healthcare providers;
- Schools can have students, faculty, and/or staff go to a test site run by New York State to have specimens collected for testing;
- Schools that currently have a **limited-service laboratory (LSL) registration** can add COVID-19 antigen testing to their existing LSL registration, request to receive rapid tests from the state and perform testing on their students, faculty, and staff;
- Schools can become approved to perform testing by obtaining an LSL registration and once approval is granted, request to receive rapid tests from the state and perform testing on their students, faculty, and staff;
- Schools can utilize **pooled testing**. However, pooled testing must be conducted by a laboratory that is approved to conduct diagnostic pooled testing so that individuals receive their test results and they can be reported to the state.
- Schools can partner with regional health providers that have an LSL or are willing to request an LSL.

LSL Partnerships

- Schools, particularly those in a designated zone, should contact **their LHDs**, and **other local health care partners** to establish partnerships and make arrangements for deployment of these tests in their school setting to facilitate the required testing of students, teachers, and staff attending in-person.
- To find a partner who has a limited-service laboratory (LSL), you can visit this website: <https://www.wadsworth.org/regulatory/clep/limited-service-labs>
- Additionally, the Department can assist with partnering a school with a community partner and schools should contact SchoolQuestionsCOVID@health.ny.gov if they are interested.

Test Kits

- NYSDOH is continuing to provide rapid testing kits for COVID-19 to local health departments (LHDs), hospitals, pharmacies, and other health care providers at no cost so long as testing is:
 - open to the public,
 - offered free of charge,
 - and prioritizes vulnerable and at-risk populations that may not currently have equitable access to testing.
- NYSDOH is also providing rapid testing kits for the virus that causes COVID-19 to schools. The tests being provided are the Abbott BinaxNow antigen tests.
- To be eligible for the free testing, schools must be current with their daily reporting to the dashboard as required under E.O. 202.61.
- LHDs have been advised to request enough testing resources to support weekly testing of 20% of the in- person student, staff, and teacher populations within the yellow zone in their area for as long as such schools remains in the yellow zone.
- LHDs may also have the test kits sent directly to the partnering provider(s).

Uploading Testing Data

- Testing data must be inputted into the **Electronic Clinical Laboratory Reporting System (ECLRS)**.
- Data entry must be completed by either the school [on behalf of the LSL holder] or the LSL holder must enter the data into ECLRS. If neither party has the capacity to enter data, one or both parties should contract with an entity to complete the data entry and share the cost.
- New users can submit a request for permission to access ECLRS under the LSL organization by sending an email to eclrs@health.ny.gov. The email must include:
 - New user full name
 - New user HCS ID
 - LSL facility name
 - LSL facility address
 - LSL facility phone number
 - LSL CLIA #
- The results must be uploaded on a line list that includes as appropriate names, addresses, date of birth, result of lab test, lab/site performing test, ordering physician, and test date of all students, faculty, and staff.
- The LSL holder must facilitate all training on how to enter the data into ECLRS.

Staffing and Training Testing Events

- Any individual who takes the required training can conduct the rapid testing provided by the NYSDOH as long as they are affiliated with an LSL.
- Training is through a series of videos and takes a total of less than 3 hours.
- Training videos, modules, helpful documents and frequently asked questions for the BinaxNOW test can be accessed on Abbott's website. See: <https://www.globalpointofcare.abbott/en/support/product-installation-training/navica-brand/navica-binaxnow-ag-training.html>.
- Schools are responsible to provide appropriately trained staff to conduct the testing.
- School nurses and other staff conducting the testing can operate under the LHD's LSL, or an alternate LSL via partnership with a community partner.

Questions:

- Questions on amending or obtaining an LSL and requests for test kits should be sent to Covid19RapidTest@health.ny.gov.
- For technical support on the BinaxNOW test, please call Abbott Technical Services at 1-800-257-8525 or email ts.scr@abbott.com.
- Questions regarding ECLRS should be sent to eclrs@health.ny.gov.
- Questions about school reporting should be sent to SchoolQuestionsCOVID@health.ny.gov.

QUESTIONS

Questions should be entered into the chat box feature.

THANK YOU
for participating in today's
discussion