

March 29, 2021



Pitt County Schools Parents and Families,

Pitt County Schools was one of the first school districts to return to in-person instruction when schools reopened in August 2020. While this was concerning to some, it was in the best interest of our students. While there have been cases of COVID in our schools, we have seen little transmission. This is due to our aggressive stance in identifying cases and quarantining contacts.

As more students return face-to-face, it is important to remind families of the COVID protocols. PCS is required to work with the Pitt County Health Department and to follow the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services guidelines for mitigating COVID. Those guidelines are located in the NC Strong Schools Toolkit at: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/media/164/open>

During allergy season, we know the protocols will present challenges and frustrations for families. COVID symptoms resemble other common illnesses such as colds, strep throat, sinus infections and/or allergies. Following the guidelines are necessary to mitigate the spread of COVID. It is important for families to note the symptoms screening list below and on page 5 of the toolkit. These symptoms may require quarantine until a diagnosis can be determined by a medical provider or until a negative PCR COVID test result is received.

- Fever (100.4 °F or higher) or chills
- New cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- New loss of taste or smell
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Headache
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

Please note other important guidelines schools must continue to follow:

- Masks must still be worn by all staff and students (page 10-11)
- Household members of a symptomatic individual must also quarantine (page 16)
- PCS school nurses, administration and COVID contacts must follow guidelines for communicating the return to school to anyone who may have been excluded. A summary and clear scenarios are available for this protocol on page 10 of this additional document: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/media/444/open>

We understand the difficulty this can cause and that many quarantined students have not developed COVID. While, this is frustrating we have to continue with the exposure definition. PCS, in cooperation with PCHD, was an early adopter of a “test out of quarantine strategy” which has saved numerous days of quarantine for those exposed, while protecting the safety of all. With many of our faculty and staff now vaccinated, the need to quarantine staff should soon be minimal. If you have not been, please consider being vaccinated. All three of the COVID vaccines are safe and effective.

We are clearly gaining on COVID. Our case numbers are declining, and the number of vaccinated individuals in Pitt County is growing. We know this has been a long, hard year for our families and our community, but the end of this pandemic may finally be in sight. Please understand that we must still protect our unvaccinated faculty, staff and students from COVID. This will still include quarantine and testing. Guidance in the COVID vaccine era is evolving and may not address all possible exposure situations. Please understand that we must act to protect all those individuals involved in an exposure and we will always err on the side of caution. We ask that you display patience with our nurses, administrators, and staff or officials regarding the need for isolation or quarantine. Please help us stay the course as we drive COVID from our community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ethan Lenker, PCS Superintendent

Dr. John Silvernail, Pitt County Health Department Director

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