



CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

PAUL M. WENDEL, JR.
County Executive

CHRISTINE SCHUYLER
Director of Health and Human Services
(Commissioner of Social Services/Public Health Director)

March 15, 2020

Dear School Superintendents,

In response to the Novel Coronavirus Pandemic, Chautauqua County government declared a local state of emergency effective today, March 15, 2020 at 5p.m. This declaration included the provision that public health recommendations may be issued to protect life and property and bring the emergency situation under control.

As such, I am recommending that school districts in Chautauqua County close to students effective Wednesday, March 18, 2020 until further notice. This recommendation applies to students; districts can make individual determinations about faculty and staff.

Over the last few weeks, the presence of and response to COVID-19 has evolved rapidly in New York State. While there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Chautauqua County to date, several other counties now have confirmed cases. I believe that the pattern of this pandemic demonstrates that community spread is inevitable.

We are working diligently with our state and county agencies and our community partners to plan and respond to this emerging public health issue. Our response to this pandemic involves phasing various actions to help slow the spread of disease so that our health care system is not overburdened. These actions first include personal protective measures for everyday (staying home when ill, covering coughs and sneezes, and washing hands often) and cleaning frequently touched surfaces. Community mitigation strategies to decrease contact among persons of all ages have been invoked, such as restricting large social gatherings and decreasing occupancy at venues by 50%. At this time, I feel it necessary to take the additional action of recommending closing schools to students to protect the health and well-being of our communities.

We are making this decision for several reasons:

- To slow the potential spread of disease among groups of students in confined spaces.
- To protect vulnerable populations, including older adults, those who are immune-compromised, or have a chronic medical condition, especially heart or lung disease, and diabetes.
- To promote social distancing; putting space between yourself and others, limiting large gatherings, and refraining from handshakes and hugs.

I am hopeful that taking this unprecedented, proactive step will protect our community and limit the potential spread of disease. Thank you for your partnership!

Thank you,

Christine Schuyler, BSN, RN, MHA
Director of Health & Human Services