Background:

Broome County is committed to supporting local schools with the continuation of in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The county understands the benefits and values associated with in-person learning along with the necessity of prioritizing the health and safety of students and staff. Broome County continues to advocate for schools’ needs based on our current scientific understanding of the constantly evolving and unpredictable nature of COVID-19.

On September 2, 2021, the New York State Department of Health issued a Commissioner’s determination pursuant to 10 NYCRR2.62, that is consistent with the “Staying Home When Sick and Getting Tested” section of the CDC Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools. The purpose of this determination was to inform schools of their responsibility to have policies in place concerning the process of returning to school for students and staff displaying symptoms of COVID-19. The Commissioner’s determination also stated: “schools must have the capacity ... to provide diagnostic testing, for any students, teachers or staff, who regardless of vaccination status and community level of transmission per the CDC, are a) symptomatic or b) asymptomatic following an exposure to someone with COVID-19.”

Since this determination was issued, many factors have compounded Broome County residents’ ability to obtain the preferable NAAT (molecular) COVID-19 tests in a timely manner. This is especially true for underserved residents who do not possess the insurance, transportation, or monetary resources to obtain molecular tests.

Justification of Proposed Suggestion for Return of Previously Symptomatic Students/Staff to School Using BINAX NOW Covid-19 Antigen tests:

The Broome County Executive, Broome County Health Department, Broome Tioga BOCES, and United Health Services formed a committee to provide suggestions which would assist schools in uniformly moving toward an evidence-based approach to testing symptomatic students/staff using BINAX Now COVID-19 antigen tests and conducting symptom assessments that could potentially expedite a child or staff person’s return to school.

The following considerations were noted as part of the suggestion process:

- Dr. Christopher Ryan, medical director for Broome County, conducted a literature review on the use of BINAX Now COVID-19 antigen cards which concluded; for the purposes of returning a student to in-person school attendance, a molecular test is preferable to an antigen test. However, if logistics, resources, and a child's educational progress are limiting issues, a negative BINAX Now COVID-19 antigen test could return a student to school, with the slight risk of inadvertently admitting an infected child. The review indicated the community positive ratio among children should be less than 17-18% in order to use this strategy safely. A negative antigen test done immediately on the day of symptom onset is less trustworthy, and waiting beyond the day of symptom onset would provide more confident outcomes.  


• Cases among school-aged children have been increasing in Broome County, but there has not been a reported increase in hospitalizations or adverse outcomes in children.
• Broome County has an ample supply of BINAX NOW Covid-19 antigen cards for schools to use.
• The health department is providing BINAX NOW Covid-19 testing to symptomatic students, staff, and families, along with exposed contacts, in several school districts located in underserved areas of Broome County.
• At the request of hospitals and schools, Broome County is currently offering a rapid testing site at the Health Department using the BINAX NOW Covid-19 antigen cards.
• Consultation took place with many New York State county executives, county health departments, local school medical directors, and allied New York State Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES).
• Schools are encouraged to inform their communities regarding the use of the antigen tests.

Broome County Suggestion for Return of Previously Symptomatic Students/Staff to School Using BINAX NOW Covid-19 antigen test:

Based on the above considerations and collective consensus from committee members the following suggestion has been made:

*For purposes of returning a student or staff member to in-person school attendance, a molecular test is preferable to an antigen test. However, if logistics, resources, and a child’s educational progress are limiting issues, a negative BINAX Now Covid-19 antigen test could be used for this purpose.*

A BINAX NOW Covid-19 antigen test (performed at the school, health care provider’s office, the Broome County Health Departments school testing program, or at the Broome County Health Department’s testing site) may be accepted for a student or staff member to return to in-person learning as long as the following criteria are met:

- **Symptoms are improving.**
- **No fever in the past 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.**
- **The student/staff member never had any of the most compelling or serious symptoms of COVID-19, which would include the loss of taste or smell, pneumonia, illness requiring hospitalization, or symptoms while already under quarantine as an identified exposed person.**
- **The BINAX Now Covid-19 antigen test was not performed on the day of symptom onset.**

*This is a suggestion, not formal guidance, or a mandate. It is solely for the purpose of assisting schools to make an informed decision regarding their testing strategy options for the return of symptomatic students/staff and employing the use of BINAX NOW Covid-19 antigen tests in a community with diminished capacity resources to perform molecular testing. Should New York State Department of Health provide additional guidance reflective of the specific use of BINAX NOW Antigen cards, or if community COVID-19 indicators are such that the health department chooses to change its suggestion, schools will be consulted, and a collective determination will be made moving forward.*

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