Maine DOE Newsroom

MEDIA RELEASE: Maine Department of Education Announces New Team to Support Contact Tracing in Schools

21 retired nurses join ranks with Maine Department of Education to support schools in their contract tracing efforts and notification

Augusta, MAINE – Commissioner of Education Pender Makin today announced the deployment of a team of Department of Education Contact Tracers. A cadre of nurses, many retired from years of employment in Maine schools, have received training through the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) and will be immediately called into service for school-specific contact tracing.

"This program will provide Maine schools with specialized supports throughout the contact tracing process," said Maine Commissioner of Education, Pender Makin, "It will support the work of school nurses and other school staff as they communicate with and monitor close contacts of positive cases. The overarching goal is to support our schools and keep our children actively engaged in learning while mitigating the spread and effects of this pandemic."

The new program will complement the ongoing work of Maine CDC's case investigation and contact tracing team, which now includes approximately 150 staff and volunteers.

With support and training from Maine CDC, and funded through federal emergency relief funds, the first team members have begun to assist in the notification to those who have been deemed a close contact to a staff member or student who has tested positive for COVID-19. This team will enroll "close contacts" into Sara Alert, an online platform that

Maine CDC uses to notify and monitor people exposed to the coronavirus. The Maine CDC will continue to investigate confirmed cases and outbreaks associated with schools.

“The partnership between health and education teams will help protect students, teachers, school staff, and school communities,” said Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew.

This first of its kind effort comes as Maine sees a significant increase in the prevalence of COVID-19 in Maine communities recently, increasingly impacting local schools and creating additional demands on those already conducting contact tracing for Maine CDC.

Last week, roughly half of the close contacts identified as connected with new cases of COVID-19 in Maine were associated with schools. Even though there is a lower rate of transmission in school settings than in the general community (13.5 compared to 33.1 new cases per capita in the last 30 days), Maine has taken a comprehensive approach in defining “close contacts” in schools. Out of an abundance of caution and in recognition of the difficulties in tracking the movements of children throughout a day, an expanded definition of close contact at schools includes all students within a classroom or other common setting. Therefore, a positive case within a school can have considerably more close contacts than that of a general community member.

To ease the impacts that schools are having on the system and to continue to provide responsive and timely support to school staff, students and families, Emily Poland, Maine DOE’s School Nurse Consultant, sent an open call for retired nurses to consider being trained to support contact tracing.

In a matter of two days, twenty-one nurses stepped forward, including twenty RNs and one LPN. They bring with them a collective 758 years of nursing experience, with 352 years of service as school nurses. With medical and school-based experience, this team of nurses will be an invaluable resource to families, teachers, and staff alike as they conduct the contact tracing in Maine schools.

“Nurses are heroes, they step up every day to the ever-changing challenges no matter the situation, even if it means stepping out of retirement,” said Emily Poland, DOE School Nurse Consultant. “School nurses are no different; they are dedicated to keeping their students in school and ready to learn, but this requires a lot of effort in monitoring symptoms that students have, referring to primary care providers, and communicating with families, all while attending to the various health needs of all students in the school on any given day. I am proud to be among the ranks of Maine nurses.”

“As a retired Public Health & School Nurse, with knowledge and skills of communicable disease management, my desire to ‘do something’ has continued,” said Brenda White of Freeport. “I feel selfishly blessed to be retired as I try to imagine the historic challenge for practicing school nurses during this pandemic. When I received a phone call to work with a team to focus specifically on school contact tracing, of course it was an easy ‘YES’ for me. This is something I can do from home and still stay safe, and do my small part to assist School Nurses and to control the spread of COVID-19 disease in the State of Maine.”

Additional resources are being put into place by the Department of Education in response to the recent increase in COVID-19 cases in Maine, and to assist both schools and Maine CDC. This includes the launch of a single, dedicated phone number for schools to report positive cases, and a dedicated portal through which close contact information for schools can be submitted for follow-up. The Department of Health and Human Services will supplement the team at the Department of Education as needed.

###

Share:
Email Facebook Twitter Instagram LinkedIn Print

Like this:
Loading...

Posted on **November 24, 2020**

Previous
HONORING RISE AWARD FINALIST ANDREW HUTCHINS FROM MT. BLUE

Next
MEDIA RELEASE: COMMISSIONER MAKIN SENDS SPECIAL MESSAGE OF GRATITUDE TO MAINE SCHOOLS

SUBSCRIBE VIA EMAIL

Email address Subscribe

PRIORITY NOTICE

- **PRIORITY NOTICE: Investment in Maine's Career and Technical Education Centers Critical to Economic Recovery, Says Governor Mills**
  May 14, 2021
- **PRIORITY NOTICE: 2021-2022 NEO Maine Schools for Private Schools and Updated School Approval Process**
  May 13, 2021
- **A Letter to America's Teachers from Secretary Cardona**
  May 7, 2021

More Priority Notices

PRESS RELEASES

- **An 'End of Year Message' to Maine's Education Communities from the Maine 2021 County Teachers of the Year**
  June 8, 2021
- **MEDIA RELEASE: School Nutrition Programs to Feed Children Beyond School Year with Summer Food Service Program**
  June 4, 2021
- **MEDIA RELEASE: National Funding to Support Enhanced Access, Utilization of Wabanaki Resources**
  May 27, 2021

More Press Releases

DISPATCHES

- **Priority Notice: Extension of Emergency Certification Options Coming Soon**
  June 11, 2021
- **Maine DOE Proudly Shares Summer Learning Opportunities for Education Workforce**
  June 11, 2021
- **PRIORITY NOTICE: Governor Ending State of Civil Emergency June 30, Requirements move to Recommendation**
  June 11, 2021

More Dispatches

See Full Professional Development Calendar

Search ...

FOLLOW US

Maine DOE Twitter
Maine DOE Facebook
Email subscriptions

SHARE SCHOOL SUCCESS

BROWSE BY CATEGORY OR MONTH

Select Category

BROWSE BY DATE

Select Month

MAINE DOE NEWS ON TWITTER

Tweets by @mdoenews

ME Dept of Education
@mdoenews

Maine DOE Update – June 11, 2021
mainedoenews.net/2021/06/11/mai…

Maine DOE Update – June 11, 2021
From the Maine Department of EducationReporting Items
mainedoenews.net

Jun 11, 2021

ME Dept of Education
@mdoenews

Priority Notice: Extension of Emergency Certification Options Coming Soon mainedoenews.net/2021/06/11/pri…

Priority Notice: Extension of Emergency Certification Options Coming Soon
Since May of 2020, a group of education stakeholders has been involved in a consensus-based rulemaking process, which involved reviewing and proposing revisions to Chapter 115, the State Board rule...
mainedoenews.net

Jun 11, 2021

Embed View on Twitter

LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

Maine Department …
4,386 likes

Like Page Share