



Columbia County Department of Health

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John J. Mabb, MA
Public Health Director

January 29, 2021

Dear Superintendent Suttmeier:

I am writing in regard to the recent decision by Governor Cuomo to give the authority to decide whether high risk sports resume in school districts across the state to local health departments.

As you know, currently Columbia County has the distinction of having the highest positivity rate of any county in the Capital Region. As a metric, this rate gives us a good measure of the spread of the virus within our community and while our rate has, like other counties in our area, begun to drop from the highs of the post-holiday period it continues to be of significant concern when we consider loosening any restrictions that could contribute to further spread of the virus. Therefore, my decision is a qualified “no” to the resumption of high-risk sports.

In consultation with public health directors and commissioners from throughout the region an advisory was developed which details what we would need to see before sports, particularly those played inside, can resume. Of central importance is the need for a drop in our seven day rolling average positivity rate to 4% or below. As you will recall, 4% is the rate the Governor had initially designated as a yellow zone marker and as you also know Columbia County spent much of the fall below 3%.

Two other important metrics that will weigh into our decisions about resumption of school sports include: hospital capacity, which must stay above 15%, and the continuing absence of other emerging epidemiological factors that might impact COVID control or mitigation. Of concern here is the spread of the highly contagious strain which has been found in the United Kingdom and any other emerging variants of COVID-19.

The advisory also calls for school districts to take a role in planning for the resumption of these sports. These requirements include:

- Each school district’s Board of Education or non-public school’s Board of Directors (or other appropriate person/entity) must approve the district/school’s participation in each specific high-risk sport.
- Each school superintendent/school leader must oversee the creation of a sport-specific preparedness plan, to be approved by the district/school’s medical director.
- Each parent/guardian must sign an informed consent.
- Each student-athlete must have medical clearance from their healthcare provider.
- Each parent/guardian, student-athlete, and school official must agree to fully cooperate with case investigation and contact elicitation and to adhere to isolation and quarantine orders.
- Each district/school must establish a confidential phone number and email address to allow student-athletes, parents, or others to report concerns.

Please know that I have taken my responsibility of deciding whether to allow high risk sports very seriously. I know how important sports and other extracurricular activities are to students. But keeping them safe and in school must take precedence over all other considerations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Mabb". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Jack Mabb
Public Health Director
Columbia County Department of Health

Cc: Craig J. Hansen, Director of Health and Safety/Operations and Maintenance, Questar III
BOCES