

August 31, 2020

Contact Tracers: Reopening Schools Will Endanger NYC Communities Again

New York City Test & Trace Corps workers stand in solidarity with the Movement of Rank-and-File Educators (MORE) in their refusal to return to schools until their demands regarding anti-racism, health justice, and full funding for our schools and communities are met.

As city employees tasked with reducing the spread of COVID-19 in New York City, we work tirelessly within our communities to mitigate harm caused by the coronavirus through contact tracing. We are workers making countless calls and knocking on thousands of doors to ensure that all of those who have tested positive or have been exposed to COVID-19 receive the help and resources they need to isolate or quarantine safely. Fortunately, in recent weeks, NYC has been successful at suppressing COVID-19. This appears to be the case, in part, because long, indoor exposures have been purposefully limited and testing has become widely available.

The science is clear: COVID-19 is an airborne virus that spreads in crowded, poorly ventilated spaces, like many NYC classrooms. While data around how much children transmit COVID-19 is still unsettled and thankfully younger children seem to be less vulnerable to COVID-19 compared to adults, they are not immune to infection and can spread the coronavirus. Studies suggest that high-school aged students transmit and are infected at the same rate as adults. Even if the exact science is not settled, we can look to the experiences of schools across the country during their first weeks of in-person classes as students, teachers, and parents are testing positive for coronavirus.

Prematurely reopening schools will undoubtedly lead to spikes in infections across our communities, including among teachers and school staff who are tasked with in-person responsibilities. For us in the Test & Trace Corps, reopening schools could potentially lead to an increased rate of transmission that would effectively reverse the progress we have made in this City.

We refuse to go back to the devastating lockdowns and uncontrollable spread of the coronavirus that led to nearly 20 thousand deaths and more than 50 thousand hospitalizations back in the spring. The city's current plan to reopen schools in early September contradicts the goals of our work: to limit the spread of COVID-19 within communities and ensure the health of all New Yorkers.

As contact tracers, we share teachers' concerns that the increase of high-risk interactions that accompany in-person education will result in a preventable increase of COVID-19 transmission, cases, and deaths. We reject elected leaders' model of "business as usual" in the midst of a pandemic that has caused almost 20 thousand deaths in New York City, which disproportionately impacted Black, Latinx and other immigrant communities. Even as we continue to work to bring NYC closer to a safe reopening, we recognize the public health conditions have not been met to justify the city's current plan for in-person schooling. To push forward with school reopenings without meeting the teachers' demands would undercut the progress we have made and unnecessarily endanger our communities.

In solidarity,

Anonymous NYC H&H Contact Tracers

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