



TOWN OF EAST HAMPTON

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NYS Officially Deems COVID -19 a ‘Highly Contagious Communicable Disease’

All Businesses Now Required to Enact Safety Measures to Protect Employees, in Compliance with NY HERO (Health and Essential Rights) Act

Law protects employees who report violations, concerns, or who decline to report to work in unsafe conditions

As COVID case numbers increase across the state and particularly on Long Island, reflecting the impact of the highly contagious Delta variant, private employers must now comply with the “Airborne Infectious Disease Exposure Prevention Standard[s]” defined in the NY HERO (Health and Essential Rights) Act.

The designation by the NYS Health Department and Department of Labor of COVID as an “airborne infectious disease” requires employers to activate the written exposure prevention plans required under the NY HERO Act, which became law last spring. The plans must comply with state standards regarding daily health screenings, testing, and quarantine; the use of face coverings and personal protective equipment; social distancing; hygiene; building airflow technology, and cleaning and disinfection.

Employers can utilize a model safety plan as crafted by the New York State Department of Labor, or develop their own safety plan in compliance with HERO Act standards. Required standards and model plans can be found, in English and Spanish, at <https://dol.ny.gov/ny-hero-act>. The safety plan must be distributed to all employees and posted in a prominent location at each worksite.

All non-governmental employers must implement the state-mandated workplace health and safety protections following a Sept. 6 announcement of the designation by NYS Gov. Kathy Hochul. Governor Hochul noted in her statement that our “fight against the Delta variant is not over, and we have to do everything we can to protect our workers.” Similar state mandates apply to governments.

Governor Hochul also recently signed legislation that renews local governments' ability to hold meetings remotely rather than in person, "to reduce the need for congregation at public meetings while the Delta variant is prevalent," according to the governor's website.

With COVID case numbers increasing locally, the Town of East Hampton has once again suspended in-person meetings in the interest of safety to prevent the spread of the highly transmissible virus variant. Town offices remain open, but a mask mandate for all, whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, has been reinstated.

The number of new confirmed COVID-19 cases across Long Island more than doubled earlier this week, from Sunday to Monday, while Suffolk County reported a 5.5-percent positivity rate on Sept. 13. More locally, tests conducted in East Hampton and Montauk reached a high positivity rate in the 12 and 13 percent range in a recent week, and Stony Brook Southampton Hospital reported a positivity rate of close to 9 percent on COVID tests conducted on Sept. 9, 10, 11, and 13.

As has been done throughout the pandemic, Town Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc is continuing to provide COVID safety information to members of the community and to businesses, through the town's social media, website, and other outlets, and to businesses through local Chambers of Commerce and through the town's Business Advisory Committee.

"The challenge to our community health and safety posed by COVID-19 is far from over," said Supervisor Van Scoyoc. "We must continue to work together to safeguard all of our residents and their families by following safety protocols, including getting vaccinated, and isolating and getting tested if exposed to the virus, to prevent its spread."

Vaccines are administered by Stony Brook Southampton Hospital, at the hospital's Parrish Memorial Hall, with the Pfizer vaccine available to those aged 12 and up on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from noon to 6 p.m. Third dose vaccines are available only to the moderately or severely immunocompromised, based on CDC guidelines. Information is available at <https://southampton.stonybrookmedicine.edu/COVID19Vaccinations>.

COVID tests are also available at the hospital (https://southampton.stonybrookmedicine.edu/services/laboratory/covid-19_testing) and at the testing sites in Montauk and at East Hampton Town Hall, by appointment through <https://testbeforeyougo.com/>.