

1. It is critical to distinguish between county-run detention centers and OCFS (state-run) residential facilities. OCFS facilities do not have the same capacity limitations as do county detention programs. OCFS houses between 5-60 youth in each facility, operating at between a tenth to a third of capacity. The youth engage in programs and services both in the facility (such as counseling and school) and outside (recreation and family visitation, weather permitting).
2. Mask mandates – OCFS facilities are specially exempted from recent changes in mask and social distancing parameters because of the unique congregate care environment. Staff are required to wear masks at facilities and youth are encouraged to wear masks. OCFS provides masks to both staff and youth. Youth and staff are expected to maintain six feet of social distance whenever possible.
3. Vaccinations – OCFS cannot force youth or staff to receive a vaccine; vaccination is voluntary. OCFS has encouraged all staff to receive vaccinations since they first became eligible earlier this year. OCFS has also provided information about vaccination and vaccination locations across the state to staff. To be vaccinated, a youth must be eligible (note that the majority of youth in OCFS custody only became eligible for the vaccine this month), must consent, and, if they are younger than 18, their parent or caregiver must consent. When a youth is eligible and has all necessary consents, OCFS does not delay in arranging to have them vaccinated. Thus far, about 14% of youth have been vaccinated. OCFS has partnered with the NYS Office of Mental Health's O-LOV program to facilitate vaccines for staff and youth and works closely with county health departments, which have also come to the facilities to vaccinate staff and youth.

OCFS is well aware of how deeply historical and institutional racism have affected youth in care and their families. That awareness extends to the reality that Black and Brown communities have been traumatized by the history of racism in medical care and that it is OCFS's active obligation to provide quality medical care to youth. OCFS has provided youth and their families with information about COVID protocols and vaccination through letters and via caseworker outreach. OCFS facilities have also held town halls where nursing teams have given youth the opportunity to ask questions about COVID and about vaccinations.

Medical information is private, and OCFS is prohibited from requiring staff to disclose whether they are vaccinated. The 33% rate of vaccination among staff reflects what staff have voluntarily chosen to disclose. OCFS presumes the actual staff vaccination rate is higher than 33%, as there are likely staff who have been vaccinated and have not shared that information with OCFS.

4. Quarantine – The 454 instances of quarantine included precautionary intake quarantine and quarantine when the youth was either exposed to a COVID-positive individual or was suspected of being sick themselves. With those parameters, some youth were placed on medical quarantine more than once out of an abundance of caution. Each youth in OCFS facilities has their own, private room on a living unit, which houses no more than 12 youth and as few as five.
5. OCFS does not have "dormitories."
6. Rate of testing – Ms. Peterson's quote and information regarding OCFS's rate of testing for COVID is misleading as it attempts to compare two sets of data points that do not

correspond to each other. The World Health Organization statistics derive from the testing of general populations without symptom-inclusive pre-screening. OCFS COVID-tested youth who showed COVID-consistent symptoms or were exposed to a known positive individual. Further, OCFS ruled out flu and strep infection before testing for COVID. As a result of this process, it is statistically unsurprising that the final calculation of OCFS' positive COVID test rate would be higher than what the WHO found in the general population.

The article's statement that OCFS acts as if children of color are "disposable" is deeply insulting to the dedicated and hard-working staff who provide much needed support, services and mentorship to the youth placed by courts in OCFS care and custody.

7. Lack of information to parents – The reporter fails to mention that, for example, when youth are discharged to their families, OCFS sends a comprehensive letter explaining the COVID measures families should take when their child comes home. Tests measure a single point in time; they are not an end-all tool in COVID mitigation. OCFS does not perform rapid tests before discharge because they are less reliable than PCR tests and can produce false negatives (which could also create a false sense of security for the youth and family). Rather than asking parents to isolate youth with a potential false negative result, OCFS instead asks families to quarantine them for 14 days, which OCFS views as a more compassionate choice. This letter and many others are available on OCFS's website.

OCFS's guidance regarding COVID-related matters is determined by its medical director, directives issued by NYS DOH and the CDC, and in consultation with local departments of health. OCFS administration makes COVID-related decisions in collaboration with medical professionals. For example, when our parental guidance, referenced just above, was initially written, the quarantine was 14 days. When the CDC changed their recommendation to 10 days if asymptomatic, we discussed this with NYS DOH and were told that we could retain our more conservative standard internally – given the concerns over congregate care settings, and we did not modify our internal or external guidance.

8. OCFS doesn't have "minimum security" facilities. OCFS operates non-secure, limited secure and secure facilities using a trauma-informed model of care that is quite different from adult corrections.
9. Facility residents are not mainly from Long Island or upstate cities like Buffalo and Rochester. Youth in the state-run residential centers come from all over the state.
10. There is no basis in fact for the reporter's assertion that, "Although New York did not specify the number of individual children placed in quarantine, the more than 450 quarantine instances suggest as many as 8 in 10 youth housed in 11 detention facilities could have had COVID-19, or were exposed to it." 450 equals the number of quarantine *instances* – not the number of youth who were in quarantine. The number of unique youth placed in quarantine from October 2020 to Jan 2021 is 221.
11. Columbia County – A statement issued by Columbia County contained inaccurately high numbers of COVID cases attributed to Brookwood Secure Center, far beyond the number of cases ever reported at the facility. OCFS contacted the county for correction.

12. Regarding union staff – OCFS has communicated extensively with union leaders about its COVID health and safety protocols that include the distribution of personal protective equipment and vaccination efforts. This includes documented meetings, letters and phone calls.