

January 14, 2022

To: Parents/Guardians

RE: Updates to COVID-19 prevention and management in schools

Peel Public Health welcomes the re-opening of schools next week to best support students' learning needs and their mental health and well-being. We recognize parents and students are concerned about returning during a time of high transmission with the Omicron COVID-19 variant. In response to a less severe variant and generally milder disease in children, the province has changed its approach to the management of COVID-19 exposures in schools.

The following letter provides a summary of the provincial updates and important information on actions students should take to reduce their risk of COVID-19 in schools.

1. Daily Screening

Continue to check for symptoms and actively screen your children everyday. **Follow your school's screening instructions based on the provincial on-line self-assessment tool: [COVID-19 school and childcare screening \(ontario.ca\)](https://www.ontario.ca/covid-19-school-and-childcare-screening).**

Because of recent changes made to provincial testing requirements, **a positive test is no longer required to confirm COVID-19**. Due to the high number of Omicron cases in Ontario, parents should assume children with the following symptoms are infected with COVID-19.

If your child has 1 of the following symptoms:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fever (37.8° C or higher) and/or chills• Cough	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shortness of breath• Decrease or loss of smell or taste

OR

...2 of the following symptoms:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Runny nose or stuffy/congested nose• Headache• Sore throat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Muscle aches or joint pain• Extreme fatigue• Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea (gastrointestinal symptoms)

Any child with symptom(s) of COVID-19 above and their household members must self-isolate at home. Children may co-isolate with a caregiver if needed. All household members, including vaccinated and previously infected individuals must stay home until the sick child completes their isolation period.

When a child has **only one** of the symptoms in the white box (above) OR a different symptom (e.g., pink eye), the child should isolate until symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours (OR 48 hours if they have diarrhea or vomiting - gastrointestinal symptoms). Household members do not need to isolate.

Please note that isolation requirements also apply if anyone at home is sick (e.g. parents) and students cannot go to school. Visit the [provincial self-assessment tool](#) for directions on what you and your household members must do if you or your child has symptoms. A summary flowchart is also attached.

2. Rapid antigen and PCR take-home tests from school

Time-limited supplies of rapid antigen and PCR take-home tests will be available at schools. When available, these tests should only be used when your child has symptoms of COVID-19 to confirm the infection. If not available, your child and household must isolate with presumed COVID-19.

Rapid antigen tests (two tests)

A positive rapid antigen test is now considered to be a confirmed COVID-19 infection and does not need to be confirmed with a PCR test.

If a symptomatic child has access to a rapid antigen test, they may be cleared from isolation if they have two negative rapid antigen tests taken 24-48 hours apart. For more details, see the rapid antigen testing section on: [What to do if you've been exposed to COVID-19 | COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) in Ontario](#).

PCR tests (single test)

Take-home PCR self-collection test kits will be provided only to elementary/secondary students and education staff who become symptomatic while at school.

PCR self-collection kits will not be provided to individuals experiencing single symptoms that only require isolation until the symptom is improving for 24-48 hours (e.g., runny nose). PCR kits will not be given to entire classes or schools.

If a test is not available, or your child develops COVID-19 symptoms at home, stay home and isolate. Students and staff are not eligible to be tested at a COVID-19 testing centre, unless they meet the provincial PCR testing criteria.

Check with your school to see if they have tests in stock.

3. Vaccination

COVID-19 vaccinations are the most effective prevention measure against COVID-19. All children 5 years of age and older are strongly recommended to get vaccinated. Appointments can be booked through Ontario's vaccine booking system or by calling 1-833-943-3900 (TTY 1-866-797-0007). Vaccines are also being offered at select pop-up clinics, school vaccine clinics, pharmacies, and doctor's offices. Please visit [Get your vaccine](#) to find locations, hours, and how to book appointments.

4. Masking

Wearing a well-fitted mask continues to be an important layer of prevention of COVID-19 in schools. A supply of 3-ply non-medical masks from the Ministry of Education will be available at schools for student use. Proper fit is a key factor in mask effectiveness. Check this link for [how to improve mask fit](#). For more information on masks, check [COVID-19 mask use: Types of masks and respirators - Canada.ca](#)

5. Exposures for COVID-19 contacts in schools

In response to the Omicron surge, the Ministry of Health has directed public health units to focus on managing COVID-19 in the highest risk settings like hospitals and long-term care homes. Since children generally experience milder illness, schools are no longer considered high-risk settings according to the Ministry. **This change in Ministry protocol also means that class dismissals are no longer being used as a measure at this time.** As with other respiratory illnesses, children and staff, along with their household members, are expected to isolate and stay home when sick.

If your family has been exposed to someone with COVID-19 outside your household, visit the provincial website for further information on: [What to do if you've been exposed to COVID-19.](#)

Parent webinar on Monday, January 17 at 7 pm

Please join us to learn more about these updates on COVID-19 at our parent webinar on Monday, featuring Dr. Lawrence Loh, Dr. Alia Sunderji, Dr. Rachita Gurtu and Dr. Monica Hau from Peel Public Health.

If you have any questions, please call Peel Public Health at 905-799-7700, Monday to Friday, from 8:30 am – 4:30 pm.

Sincerely,

Peel Public Health