

October 5, 2021

Memorandum to: Chairs of District School Boards
Directors of Education
School Authorities

From: Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

Subject: **COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Screening for Students and Children in Schools and Child Care**

We are pleased to inform you about additional targeted, voluntary asymptomatic rapid antigen screening that the Ministry of Education, in partnership with Ministry of Health and Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, is making available to support a healthy and safer in-person learning experience for students and children.

While Ontario schools have implemented robust health and safety measures to support a safer in-person learning experience for students, screening unvaccinated asymptomatic students and children may provide an additional layer of protection in schools in areas of the province where risk of transmission is higher. The use of rapid antigen screening for unvaccinated asymptomatic children in school and licensed child care settings in targeted communities aligns with recent advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH).

Overview: School Rapid Antigen Screening

In regions of the province where there is a heightened risk of potential COVID-19 spread, local public health units can offer rapid antigen screening to select schools in their communities at a frequency of twice per week over a defined period of time.

As children with COVID-19 infection are often not symptomatic, this screening is intended to provide an additional tool for schools to identify asymptomatic cases early to minimize risk of outbreaks and potential closures. Public health units will use available data and work with school boards to identify schools for participation in this initial phase of implementation.

Criteria

Under this initiative, rapid antigen screening tests will be made available to unvaccinated students with no symptoms and who are not considered high-risk

contacts of a case. Parents must consent to their child participating in rapid antigen screening and testing will be completed at home. To support this, the ministry will provide an implementation package to identified school boards that schools can use to communicate details of screening to parents, and to support school board leaders in supporting this screening initiative.

Implementation

COVID-19 rapid antigen screening plan for child care and school age children will proceed as follows:

- Local Medical Officers of Health will determine if rapid antigen screening will be made available in their region based on local needs. This may include the identification of specific schools and licensed child care settings that could benefit from additional screening;
- Parents can choose if their children will participate in this additional screening offered by their schools and licensed child care settings;
- Rapid antigen screening will be used only for unvaccinated, asymptomatic students and children who are not high-risk contacts. Symptomatic children or high-risk contacts must continue to access PCR testing at a local assessment centre or community lab;
- Children participating will conduct screening at home. If a student tests positive, they must follow their local public health guidance, stay home from school and get a PCR test as soon as possible to confirm the result.

As always, we will continue to work with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and local public health units to assess key indicators, such as vaccination rates and community transmission, to inform and update guidance for schools and child care as needed.

We acknowledge the important work that our local public health units and schools are doing already to keep schools open by implementing protective measures, and know that this initiative will be an important step in achieving our collective goal of keeping students healthy and safe.

Thank you for your continued partnership in implementing local testing initiatives this school year.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce
Minister

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

c: Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario
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