

March 9, 2022

Memorandum to: Directors of Education
Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities

From: Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

Subject: **Ministry of Education Update: Lifting of Health and Safety Measures in Schools**

The Ministry of Education continues to be committed to supporting a return to a more normal learning experience for students. As we adapt our COVID-19 pandemic response to the evolving health environment, we are providing an update on key health and safety measures for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year.

Based on advice from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH), and in alignment with community measures, the province is returning schools to a more normal learning environment, while maintaining protective measures – like rapid tests, ventilation improvements, screening and continued access to free PPE for students and staff.

Effective March 14, 2022:

Vaccination Disclosure Policy and Community Use of Schools

Effective March 14, 2022, the instructions issued by the OCMOH related to vaccination disclosure policies will be revoked across all sectors.

As of this date, school boards are no longer required to have a COVID-19 vaccine disclosure policy in place and provincial requirements below will be lifted:

- Collecting proof of COVID-19 vaccinations, medical exemptions, or completion of an education program.
- Asymptomatic screening requirements for individuals who do not provide proof of full vaccination.
- Reporting vaccination coverage to the Ministry of Education.
- Reporting test usage as part of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program to the Ministry of Health, (this change is reflected in recent direction from the Ministry of Health and noted below).

Therefore, effective March 14, unvaccinated individuals covered under school board vaccination policies will no longer be required to undertake rapid antigen screening three times per week.

This change should be communicated to impacted staff/individuals.

In addition, effective March 10, 2022, the Ministry of Health is removing reporting requirements for organizations including school boards that receive free rapid antigen tests from the government through the Provincial Antigen Screening Program for the purpose of vaccination disclosure policies. School boards will no longer be required to report weekly rapid antigen test (RAT) usage to the Ministry of Health, including those who are currently using the Thrive Health app. MOH will continue to monitor program uptake using internal deployment data, which aligns with Health Canada's recent shift in reporting requirements.

The ministry has greatly appreciated your cooperation in implementing this policy in your workplaces.

As a reminder, as of March 1, 2022, all provincial proof of vaccination requirements were lifted for the Community Use of Schools, consistent with the direction for broader community and recreational settings.

Effective March 21, 2022:

Masking & Staff Personal Protective Equipment

In alignment with community masking requirements, masks will no longer be required for students, staff and visitors in schools, school board offices and on student transportation. Eye protection for staff will also no longer be required. As some students and staff may choose to continue to wear masks or eye protection, the government will continue to provide free masks and eye protection. School boards can continue to order this optional PPE for students and staff through the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.

In addition, we know that many students and staff may choose to continue to wear masks at times, or consistently for the remainder of the school year. We encourage school boards and schools to promote respectful, welcoming and inclusive practices and communications within their school communities.

Where staff are required to perform an Aerosol Generating Medical Procedure (AGMP) or required to be in the same room when an AGMP is being performed, N95 respirators (fit tested) will continue to be provided.

A reminder that under [current federal travel requirements](#), upon return from international travel, individuals must, wear a mask at all times when in public spaces (including schools and child care), maintain a list of all close contacts for your first 14 days in Canada, and monitor yourself for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

Lifting of Cohorting and Distancing

Cohorting and distancing will no longer be required in schools. Assigned seats and cohorting will no longer be required in student transportation. Elementary students can play and learn together across cohorts, classes and grades, both indoors and outdoors and during lunch and recess. Shared spaces, such as libraries, tech labs, theatres and music rooms can be fully utilized without distancing. Programs across grades, such as reading buddies, can return. Limitations on in-person gatherings and assemblies will also be removed; therefore, schools can plan and host in-person events (e.g., proms, graduation ceremonies, and assemblies).

Schools are encouraged to immediately move toward normal conditions within all school settings. This means that schools should plan and implement measures to allow students to congregate, including removing cohorting/zoning at recess, reconfiguring learning spaces to allow students to sit in groupings and/or circles, and to facilitate peer conversation and collaboration, both during class and lunch periods.

On-site Confirmation of Screening

Daily on-site confirmation of screening for all students and staff will no longer be required. Staff and students should continue to self-screen every day before attending school using either the [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#), or a screening tool designated by the local public health unit. The screening tool has been updated to align with the updated [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#).

Local public health units may designate a commensurate or more restrictive screening tool for local use.

Short-term Remote Learning

The ministry recognizes that these changes are significant. Moving toward normalcy is a welcome change for many and is fully supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. However, some students and families may find this transition challenging. School boards may receive requests for a short-term remote learning option and are asked to consider accommodating these requests within current teaching capacity in virtual learning, and in alignment with PPM 164. Remote learning packages, and/or access to broadcast grade-based resources available through TVO/TFO may be helpful to educators, students and families in supporting this transition. School boards are encouraged to identify remote learning solutions that are aligned with PPM 164.

Keeping schools open for in-person learning has been vital to supporting student mental health and well-being, which has remained a top priority. This will be further enhanced by the withdrawal of additional restrictions and return to more normalized classroom and school interactions with peers and caring adults.

Remaining Health and Safety Measures in Schools for the 2021-22 School Year

Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

Appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette should continue to be promoted and integrated throughout the school day.

Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfecting

Schools and school vehicles are expected to continue with enhanced cleaning protocols in place. Required critical supplies and equipment, for example, disinfectant, will continue to be provided to school boards through the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services and the government's pandemic supply chain.

Ventilation Measures

Significant improvements have been made to ventilation and filtration through the implementation of various measures across all schools, including improvements to existing ventilation systems, deployment of standalone HEPA filter units and other ventilation devices, upgrades to school ventilation infrastructure, and increased transparency for students, parents and staff. Further upgrades to optimize air quality will continue through implementation of ventilation improvement measures, including deployment of up to 49,000 additional standalone HEPA filter units, building on enhanced ventilation delivered in all Ontario schools and over 73,000 HEPA filter units already delivered.

School boards are expected to continue to implement ventilation best practices outlined in [2021:B14 School Ventilation](#). This includes use of standalone HEPA filter units in occupied kindergarten classrooms and in all occupied learning spaces without mechanical ventilation.

Standalone HEPA filter units for mechanically ventilated learning spaces where the ventilation systems are not able to use MERV 13 rated filters are also being provided to school boards through the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.

Any additional HEPA filter units should continue to be deployed by school boards in learning spaces in a manner that maximizes their benefit.

School boards are expected to continue to work with qualified persons to plan for and continue to make upgrades to improve ventilation infrastructure, where required. Projects should be prioritized to meet appropriate minimum ventilation guidelines from the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) Standard 62.1-2019.

Absence Reporting

To continue ongoing monitoring of COVID-19 impacts, schools will continue to be expected to report absenteeism rates to public health units should they rise to a defined

level (approximately 30% above their baseline). School boards are expected to continue to report daily on absenteeism and closures through the absence reporting tool (ART) for posting on [Ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca) until April 14, 2022. The ministry is reviewing and monitoring absenteeism and will determine whether the collection and posting of information on [Ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca) will extend beyond this timeline.

Schools and school boards should continue to have protocols in place to manage ill individuals while at school. As a reminder, anyone who is sick or has any new or worsening symptoms of illness should stay home until their symptoms are improving for 24 hours (or 48 hours for nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea) and should seek assessment from their health care provider if needed.

COVID-19 Funding

While many health and safety measures are being lifted, in recognition of supports put in place by school boards, the more than \$1.6 billion in temporary COVID-19 resources confirmed in November 2021 will continue to be made available to school boards for the remainder of the 2021-22 school year, including renewal of funding for school focused nurses across local public health units.

COVID-19 Testing Strategy for Ontario Schools

Rapid Antigen Tests

As you are aware, the ministry has made 3.6M rapid antigen tests (RATs) available to school boards on a bi-weekly basis. This allocation was based on providing 2 tests per student/staff at 30% of total enrolment/staff head count for schools and child care centres.

Bi-weekly shipments of RATs will continue to support **symptomatic testing only** for staff, students and children. Schools are expected to continue distributing RATs to staff and students who return from an unplanned absence.

The ministry is supportive of school boards/child care centres distributing five tests for each staff, student and child following an unplanned absence or dismissal. The total number of RATs to support this ongoing initiative will not increase. School boards/child care centres will need to manage their allocation to ensure that enough tests are available. Shipments will continue to include a mix of 5-25 tests packs. If tests received are larger than five test packs per box, schools and child care centres must continue to de-kit boxes in order to create kits with five tests. De-kitting instructions will be shared separately, as well as an updated letter to the community that can be shared with students, children and staff.

As a reminder, staff and students can also access RATs via participating community locations. Please see <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/rapid-test-locator> for specific locations.

Vaccination

Vaccination remains the best defense against COVID-19, including the Omicron variant. We ask that you continue to promote COVID-19 vaccination for students, families and staff.

Updated Case and Contact Management Guidance

Further to the updates mentioned above, the Ministry of Health has revised the [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#), with updated guidance for close contacts in the community and in households:

- Asymptomatic individuals who are close contacts of a case or a symptomatic individual in the community are no longer required to isolate but must self-monitor for 10 days following last exposure. During the self-monitoring period, close contacts must wear a well-fitted mask in all public settings and avoid activities where they need to take off their mask (for example, playing a wind instrument in music class or playing high-contact sports).
- Asymptomatic household contacts of a case or a symptomatic individual are also not required to isolate if they are 17 or younger and [fully vaccinated](#); 18 and older and have already received their COVID-19 booster; or tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 90 days and have completed their isolation period. Asymptomatic household contacts who are not required to isolate are also required to self-monitor for 10 days following last exposure, as outlined above. Children under 5 who are asymptomatic household contacts are required to isolate for 5 days.

The COVID-19 school and child care screening tool has been updated to align with the recent changes made to federal travel requirements.

Note that the Ministry of Health has also consolidated guidance documents into the updated [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#) which includes information that is applicable to schools and child care. As a result, the Ministry of Health's school and child care-specific guidance documents, [COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Schools and Child Care: Omicron Surge](#) and [COVID-19 Guidance: School Case, Contact, and Outbreak Management](#), have been discontinued.

The ministry has greatly appreciated your cooperation in implementing all the enhanced health and safety measures to support safer schools and communities since the start of the pandemic. As we begin adapting to the broader health trends while providing students with a more normal learning experience, school boards and schools are expected to actively communicate how measures are being lifted to students, families and staff within the school.

As always thank you for continued collaboration and partnership to support students and staff.

Sincerely,

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

- c: Executive Director, Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario (ACÉPO)
- Executive Director, Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)
- Executive Director, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA)
- Executive Director, Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
- Executive Director, Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)
- Executive Director and Secretary-Treasurer, Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO)
- General Secretary, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)
- General Secretary, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
- General Secretary, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)
- Chair, Ontario Council of Educational Workers (OCEW)
- Chair, Education Workers' Alliance of Ontario (EWAO)
- Co-ordinator, Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario (CUPE-ON)
- Executive Director, Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO)
- Executive Director, Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO)
- Executive Director, Ontario Principals' Council (OPC)