

January 12, 2022

Memorandum to: Chairs of District School Boards
Directors of Education
Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities

From: Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

Subject: Ministry of Education Update

Thank you to our school board partners for the smooth transition to remote learning over the last two weeks, supporting students with special education needs to learn in-person, and your continued efforts to help prepare for a return to in-person learning.

We understand how important it is for students to be learning in-person – alongside their peers – to support their well-being, mental health, and development. We remain committed to the health and safety of our school communities while providing our students with a learning experience that allows them to reach their full potential.

As announced today, the government of Ontario has confirmed the return of in-person learning for all publicly funded and private schools starting January 17, 2022, with enhanced health and safety measures in place. As announced today, these new measures include the deployment of additional rapid antigen tests and establishing school-based vaccination clinics.

These measures build on the updated and additional health and safety measures in schools and child care centres, including those that were put in place on the advice of the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) and announced on December 30, 2021:

- Updating the COVID-19 school and child care screener and asking students, parents and staff for screening and monitoring of symptoms, including daily onsite confirmation of self-screening.
- Providing non-fit-tested N95 masks for staff in schools and licensed child care settings as an optional alternative to medical/surgical masks, and additional supply of high-quality three-ply cloth masks that are strongly encouraged and free for students.
- Deploying an additional 3,000 standalone HEPA filter units to school boards, building on the existing 70,000 HEPA filter units and other ventilation devices in schools.

- Temporary measures to reduce contacts, including pausing indoor high contact and high intensity extra-curricular activities, and cohorting measures for elementary students during recess and outdoor breaks.
- Guidance for school boards to minimize school closures related to absenteeism (i.e. rotating/planned remote days if needed) and;
- Guidance related to ongoing supports for virtual learning, including opportunities for students who choose to transition to virtual learning in the short term.

As we adapt our pandemic response to the evolving health environment, based on advice from the OCMOH, we are providing an update on key measures that will support a return to in-person learning and continuity of learning for students.

We ask that you continue to reinforce and communicate the importance of these measures to students, staff, and parents/guardians.

School boards are permitted to move to a regular timetable for secondary unless otherwise directed by their local public health unit (PHU). School boards are encouraged to continue to work with local PHUs to assess an appropriate timetabling model for secondary schools for February 2022 or earlier.

Before and after school child care programs will reopen in alignment with the return to in-person learning on January 17th, 2022 and the provision of emergency child care for school-aged children will end on January 14, 2022.

Enhanced Health and Safety Measures and Guidance

In follow up to the health and safety measures in schools communicated on December 30th, 2021, the Ministry, based on the advice of the OCMOH, is providing further updates to enhance guidance to school boards to support the return to in person learning.

New and updated measures and guidance will supplement and build on the existing 2021-22 school year health and safety measures to ensure as safe and healthy a school environment as possible, as outlined in the [COVID-19: Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for Schools \(2021-22\)](#).

1. Vaccination

With the rapid spread of the Omicron variant and schools re-opening next week, there is a strong need to get students and staff vaccinated as soon as possible. Vaccination continues to represent the most effective strategy to protect Ontarians from COVID-19, and vaccination rates for school staff and eligible students continue to rise. As of January 10th, 2022, 47.0% of children aged 5-11 have received a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, and 82.6% of youth aged 12–17 are fully vaccinated with two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

As Ontario's vaccine rollout continues, we are increasing efforts to encourage greater uptake of vaccination for children aged 5-11. We are asking school boards to continue to work closely with their PHUs to support planning for COVID-19 vaccine clinics, and take the lead in outlining the importance of getting vaccinated as a means to support schools staying open and keeping staff, children and communities safe.

Students

To support greater uptake of vaccination for children 5-11, PHUs and local school boards are encouraged to work together to plan for vaccine clinics that are targeted towards this population. PHUs and school boards are asked to add vaccine clinics during the school day. Students will require parental consent for these clinics. School boards are asked to distribute consent forms to parents and work with PHUs to identify schools that would be good candidates for clinics, based on student vaccination rates and parent consent rates.

PHUs and school boards are also encouraged to continue to plan for school-focused clinics which may operate before and after school hours, either in schools or in other sites.

School boards are expected to work with local PHUs and share documents and other information with families, such as the Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Vaccine Information Sheet: For Children \(age 5-11\)](#), [COVID-19 Vaccine Information Sheet \(age 12+\)](#), sample [COVID-19 Vaccine Children/ Youth \(Age 5-17\) Consent Form](#) and other resources available at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-children-and-youth>.

In particular, school boards will be required to:

- i) Distribute and collect information and consent forms;
- ii) Identify initial school locations to host vaccine clinics based on consent forms collected and discussions with PHUs;
- iii) Identify other school locations that can serve as vaccination hubs for multiple schools/community that would support broader student and family access; and
- iv) Provide necessary resources to make space available in schools for vaccination to take place during the instructional day, and support local PHUs in planning efforts, including communication to families.

We ask that school boards initiate work with local PHUs as soon as possible to support planning and implementation.

Staff

The Ministry has been working over the last few weeks to support enhanced and ongoing access to vaccinations, particularly boosters, for school and education staff leading up to the return to in-person learning.

School boards should continue to promote booster dose opportunities for all education staff.

Vaccination Disclosure Attestation Monthly Reporting

As a follow-up to the *Third Dose Opportunities for Education and Child Care Staff* Memorandum issued on January 6, 2022, the Vaccination Attestation Summary Reporting Template, attached to this memo, has been updated from version 4 to version 4.1.

The template now includes one new reporting element in each of the three sections of the Reporting Template to capture individuals who are subject to the vaccination disclosure policy and who have received a booster dose, called “Total number of individuals who have attested to having received a COVID-19 vaccine booster dose”. This new element can be found on lines 13 or 14, depending on the section of the reporting template.

While the completion of the full monthly reporting template has been waived for the month of January as school boards continue to support their students during this remote learning period, there is interest in collecting information on booster dose coverage sooner. School boards are requested to use version 4.1 and **only complete three cells** (D25, D42 and D60) and then return the completed template to the ministry by **January 20, 2022** to the vaccination attestation inbox.

General reminders:

- In addition to the modified submission due January 20, 2022, school boards must submit data to the Ministry of Education on a monthly basis, by the first Friday of the month (e.g. Feb 4, Mar 4, Apr 1, May 6, Jun 3).
- Reporting templates should continue to be submitted to the following email address: vaccinationattestation.edu@ontario.ca using the following naming convention: VaccinationAttestation_Reporting Period Date_School Board Name.xls, for example: VaccinationAttestation_February 4, 2022_Toronto District School Board.
- School boards should also continue to publicly post aggregated, depersonalized board-level on a monthly basis, by 5 calendar days following the monthly reporting date to the ministry.
- School boards must not provide any identifying information to the ministry and should communicate to all individuals who are subject to the school board’s policy that information will be shared with the ministry in aggregate form.

If you have any questions regarding the revised Reporting Template, please submit them to vaccinationattestation.edu@ontario.ca.

2. New guidance for schools/child care and local public health

Per the government's announcement on December 30, 2021, In response to the evolving situation related to the COVID-19 Omicron (B.1.1.529) variant of concern (VOC), the Ministry of Health has provided interim public health guidance on case, contact, and outbreak management for schools and child care settings, including updated guidance for enhanced screening using polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and rapid antigen testing (RAT) (contingent on provincial supply)

For further information please review new guidance [COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Schools and Child Care: Omicron Surge Guidance](#) which is now available on the Ministry of Health's (MOH) website.

3. Reporting and monitoring of school impacts

To support ongoing monitoring and transparency related to COVID-19 impacts on schools, the ministry will be requiring schools to monitor their own absenteeism rates and report on student and staff absences, and school closures, daily through the absence reporting tool (ART). This tool, formerly used to report confirmed cases of COVID, will be reissued shortly to support this reporting.

Schools should begin reporting in ART starting on January 19, 2022. Data will begin being published on Ontario.ca starting January 24, 2022.

Given the widespread transmission of the Omicron variant and changes to the provincial testing approach, schools and child care operators will no longer be routinely notifying families of positive cases or if an individual is absent due to symptoms associated with COVID-19.

If absenteeism rises to a defined level (approximately 30% above their baseline) in schools, principals are required to notify their local PHU.

When a PHU receives information from a school principal or child care operator regarding absenteeism, or other required reporting under the [Health Protection and Promotion Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.7](#), guidance outlined in the following documents and related protocols and guidelines should be followed:

- [Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services, and Accountability](#)
- [Infectious Diseases Protocol, 2020](#)
- [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#)

Further information is being shared by the OCMOH to all local PHUs.

School principals can connect with the local PHU's school-focused nurse or other designated contact assigned to their school for further assistance.

4. Mitigating school closures

In addition to the guidance for school boards, to minimize school closures related to absenteeism announced on December 30th, 2021 (i.e. rotating/planned remote days if needed), the ministry is providing additional guidance to help maintain operational safety and provide necessary guidance to school boards with respect to dismissal of cohorts/schools.

Operational closures must be a last resort. School boards are expected to exhaust all efforts to fill staff vacancies, including through substitute teachers, retired teachers and teacher candidates with a temporary teaching certificate, before moving to remote learning for individual schools.

Boards should minimize the length of time a school is closed for operational reasons and reopen the school as soon as possible. The advice of the local public health unit may be sought on a reopening approach where appropriate.

School boards should provide as much notice as possible to students, families and staff affected by closures of in-person learning.

If a school is closed for in-person learning, school boards should report this information to the local Field Services Branch Regional Office.

5. Staffing

Further to the [announcement](#) on January 10th, 2022 to temporarily increase the 50-day re-employment rule to 95 days for teachers, principals, and vice principals in the publicly funded school system until June 30, 2022, the Ministry will be expanding the use of Temporary Certificates to a new cohort of Ontario teacher candidates in order to help provide temporary staffing stabilization in our schools.

Given continued shortages and following engagement with sector partners, new regulatory amendments will expand the use of temporary certificates to eligible first-year teacher candidates. In addition, the requirement to hold a degree will be clarified to include those candidates who have completed all of the requirements of a post-secondary degree, in a discipline other than education, whether or not it has been conferred. This will result in candidates who are in concurrent programs (where the undergraduate requirements are completed at the same time as the teacher education program) being eligible if they meet all other requirements for a temporary certificate. Temporary certificates for eligible first-year teacher candidates will be issued after the regulation is filed and be effective the date the certificate is issued and expire December 31, 2023.

The further expansion of Temporary Certificates is intended to help provide temporary staffing stabilization in our schools. It will also contribute to the completion of required practicum days at the same time.

As with the initial cohorts, Temporary Certificate holders are members of the Ontario College of Teachers. Faculties of Education will continue to set guidelines for their students depending on the structure and flexibility of their program. School boards are expected to hire from their existing daily occasional teaching and long-term occasional teaching roster prior to hiring teacher candidates on a Temporary Certificate, subject to the terms of local agreements.

6. Testing

Building on existing efforts to date, including the provision of rapid antigen screening tests to students prior to the holiday break, the Ministry will be providing two rapid antigen tests per person for symptomatic use per the [revised symptom screener](#).

Starting the week of January 10th, 2022, school boards will begin receiving shipments of rapid antigen tests.

As of January 17, school boards should have a sufficient supply of rapid tests to make two tests available for all in-person elementary students, and all school board staff who come into contact with students. School boards will also receive a substantial supply of rapid antigen tests for distribution to secondary students, with additional rapid tests being delivered during the week of January 17. These deliveries should allow for full distribution of two tests per individual for all students and staff, with a commitment to ongoing provision of rapid antigen tests, pending supply.

Please note that in alignment with guidance, school boards will be required to de-kit boxes in order to provide two rapid antigen tests per individual. School boards are also being asked to support distribution to their co-located child care centres. Rapid antigen tests will be made available for all child care children and staff, with an initial supply of two tests per individual.

Rapid antigen tests are also being made available for all school bus drivers, with an initial supply of two tests per individual.

Students and staff will be required to actively screen each day, regardless of access to testing and to isolate if symptomatic, regardless of vaccination status and/or test access.

The two rapid antigen tests provided are to be used when individuals are symptomatic.

As per the [COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Schools and Child Care: Omicron Surge Guidance](#), if two consecutive RATs, separated by 24-48 hours, are both negative, the symptomatic individual is less likely to have COVID-19 infection, and the individual should isolate until symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if gastrointestinal symptoms are present).

Further implementation details including the type of rapid antigen tests being provided, kitting instructions and distribution to co-located child care centres will be provided shortly through your regional office.

As a reminder, as an interim approach until a consistent supply of rapid antigen tests is confirmed, and in alignment with updated testing guidance from the Ministry of Health, the remaining PCR self-collection testing kits already in schools may be distributed with a targeted focus on students and staff who develop symptoms commonly associated with COVID-19 while at school. Schools can deplete their existing supply of PCR self-collection kits during the transition to rapid antigen tests across the sector. As, this is an interim testing option, additional allocations of PCR self-collection kits cannot be provided. If students are symptomatic at home, they are encouraged to stay at home and isolate and should not go to school to pick up a testing kit.

7. Masking

Staff:

Further to the commitment to provide education staff with the option of a non-fit-tested N95 mask, as of January 11th, 2022, initial deliveries have been made to all school boards.

While the guidance remains that all education staff must wear a medical/surgical mask, the ministry will also be providing education staff, including school bus drivers, with the option of a non-fit-tested N95 mask. Consistent with advice from the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development and the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, all education staff, including school bus drivers, should be provided with an allocation of one non-fit-tested N95 mask each day. Replacing a mask is driven by factors including but not limited to:

- When it is no longer tolerated or accepted;
- When the filtering part of the mask is wet;
- When the mask has lost some of its integrity: relaxed elastic, damaged filtering part; and
- When there were potentially infectious droplets splashing onto the mask.

Please be advised that to further protect the longevity of the non-fit-tested N95 masks, these masks should be restricted to indoor use. If wearing a mask while outside, staff should switch to a medical/surgical mask.

While staff are to be allocated one non-fit-tested N95/day, to the extent there may be occasional damage, school boards will be provided with a small margin for spoilage.

The existing requirement for staff who perform aerosol generating medical procedures (AGMP) to wear a fitted N95 mask does not change.

Students:

On December 30th, 2021, the government also committed to expanded access to free high-quality three-ply cloth masks. As of January 17, 2022, shipments of more than 4 million three-ply cloth masks will be complete and available for students who need them.

8. HEPA filter unit update

Further to the announcement that 3,000 additional standalone HEPA filter units will be deployed to schools, school boards have been advised of their allocation of the 3,000 additional units, with shipments beginning this week.

Building on the existing 70,000 HEPA filter units and other ventilation devices already in schools, school boards have been asked to deploy the 3,000 new units to learning environments in schools in a manner that maximizes their benefit and minimizes overall transmission risks.

The ministry will continue to work with the OCMOH and local PHUs to adjust health and safety requirements and update guidance as required based on the public health environment, to ensure schools remain as safe as possible and open for in-person learning – critical to student mental and physical health and academic success.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership as we work to keep schools safe and open to in-person learning.

Sincerely,

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Minister

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

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