

Ministry of Health

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March 17, 2022

Alexander Brown
Chair, Toronto District School Board
5050 Yonge Street
Toronto, ON M2N 5N8

Dear Alexander Brown,

Thank you for your letter dated March 11, 2022 regarding the removal of mandatory masking requirements for most settings, including schools, effective March 21, 2022.

With the peak of Omicron behind us, Ontario has been able to cautiously and gradually move through its reopening milestones. With high vaccination coverage and the availability of antiviral treatments, Ontario now has both the prevention and response tools necessary to manage the impact of COVID-19.

As we continue on this path, we are able to take a more balanced and longer-term approach to the province's pandemic response, including in Ontario schools, by removing many of the emergency measures that have been in place over the past two years.

This does not signal that COVID-19 has disappeared. We still need to do our part to protect ourselves and others from COVID-19. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the following health measures remain:

- Staff and students should continue to self-screen every day before attending school or child care and should stay at home if they are experiencing any new or worsening symptoms of illness. The provincial screening tool will continue to be updated and made available for use.
- Ventilation upgrades and enhanced air quality practices will continue to be in place.
- Rapid antigen tests will continue to be provided to support symptomatic testing for staff and students.
- Free personal protective equipment, including masks for students and non-fit tested N95 masks for education staff, will continue to be provided.
- Staff and students who have not already done so are strongly encouraged to take advantage of Ontario's robust immunization strategy.

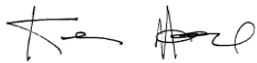
- Appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette should continue to be promoted and integrated throughout the school day, along with enhanced cleaning and disinfecting.
- Staff who may have a higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 should continue to be made aware of new antiviral treatment options and referred to their health care provider or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 to address any questions or concerns. Additional information can be found at the following link: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-antiviral-treatment>.
- Public health will continue to monitor absenteeism rates to support ongoing surveillance.

Given the robust prevention and response tools outlined above, along with continued stabilization or improvement in key public health and health system indicators, we are returning to more regular and routine ways of providing in-person learning while ensuring that individuals and families can make informed choices based on their own assessment of risk. There remain circumstances where mask wearing is recommended or required, and it will be very important to foster an environment that is kind, considerate and inclusive of those who choose to continue to wear a mask. For example:

- It is recommended that those most vulnerable to this virus should continue to wear a mask in select settings, including those who are immunocompromised or medically fragile. Those in close contact with vulnerable individuals may also consider continuing to wear a mask.
- Congregate living settings with medically and socially vulnerable individuals will continue to require masks and other preventive public health measures beyond March 21, 2022. This requirement does not apply to publicly funded or private schools, with some exceptions such as hospital school settings/authorities, or any health clinics in schools, where mask mandates may still apply to some individuals, including staff.
- Individuals who are recovering from COVID-19 or are close contacts, and those returning from international travel should follow up-to-date public health guidance on mask wearing.

Throughout the pandemic, your support, collaboration and cooperation have been instrumental in implementing enhanced public health measures to support safer schools and communities. I continue to welcome your knowledge and feedback and look forward to further communication.

Yours truly,



Dr. Kieran M. Moore, MD, CCFP(EM), FCFP, MPH, DTM&H, FRCPC FCAHS
Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario

c: Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education
Elizabeth Walker, Director Accountability and Liaison, Ministry of Health
Dr. Wajid Ahmed, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health