

Ministry of Education

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We know how critical in-person learning is to the mental health, well-being, and academic success of Ontario students. As we meet the challenge presented by the Omicron variant, we are building upon Ontario's cautious and leading plan to protect in-person learning.

Ontario students and children have benefitted from continuous efforts to keep schools and child care settings safer, including high quality masks, enhanced cleaning, and improvements in air ventilation in every school – with more than 70,000 HEPA filter units and other ventilation devices deployed. In December, Ontario sent a total of 11 million rapid antigen tests home with students to help protect against the spread of COVID-19 and to support the safe return to in-person learning following the winter break.

We are taking nothing for granted. Health and safety in our schools and child care settings remains a top priority and we continue to monitor to ensure that every precaution is taken to protect children, students, and staff and to support continued safe in-person learning.

The Children's Health Coalition – representing Ontario's children's hospitals, mental health agencies and rehabilitation centres – has emphasized that in-person education is critical to the mental health, development and well-being of children and youth. Ontario students in publicly funded schools will return to in-person learning on **January 5, 2022** for school boards previously scheduled to return January 3 to prepare for the public health measures announced on Dec. 30, 2021.

In response to the highly-transmissible Omicron variant, Ontario is putting in place additional health and safety measures to create more layers of protection to keep schools as safe as possible for in-person learning, which is critical to the positive mental health and academic success of students.

These include:

- Updating the COVID-19 school and child care screener ahead of the return to school on January 5 and asking students, parents and staff for rigorous screening and monitoring of symptoms.
- 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 and children in January.
- Deploying an additional 3,000 standalone HEPA filter units to school boards, building on the existing 70,000 HEPA filter units and ventilation devices already in schools.
- Continuing PCR testing eligibility for symptomatic elementary and secondary students, education staff and participating private and First Nation operated schools who have received a PCR self-collection kit through their school.

- Starting in January, temporarily permitting only low-contact indoor sports and safe extra-curricular activities.
- Updating COVID-19 reporting requirements for school boards and child care in January.
- Supporting the projected hiring of over 2,000 staff, funded by a \$304 million allocation for second semester that includes additional teachers, custodians, and mental health workers.

Furthermore, to maintain operational safety given anticipated higher rates of absenteeism, school boards are directed to exhaust *all* efforts to fill staff vacancies, including through substitute and retired teachers, before shifting to online learning.

Ontario's schools are also benefitting from high rates of vaccination. We thank students, parents, and staff for helping to keep our schools and child care settings safe by getting vaccinated. With 400 school-focused clinics underway, Ontario has one of the highest rates of vaccination in Canada. More than 85.9% per cent of youth aged 12 to 17 have received a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 82.2% per cent have received a second dose and 43.1% percent of Ontario children between ages 5 and 11 have received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

We encourage everyone who is eligible for a vaccination or booster to get vaccinated to further protect students as they return to school. It is natural to have questions about the vaccine. Parents or guardians with concerns can reach out to the SickKids COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service at www.sickkids.ca/vaccineconsult, or 1-888-304-6558 to book a consultation. The consultation service is available in multiple languages, using over-the-phone language interpretation. Parents and caregivers can also contact the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 to receive more information from a health specialist.

By working together, we can help Ontario students achieve a successful continuation of in-person learning this winter.

Please take a moment to review a few key important reminders or visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Dr, Kieran Moore
Chief Medical Officer of Health



Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Important Information for Parents

If you have symptoms of COVID-19

Individuals who are vaccinated, as well as children under 12 who have symptoms of COVID-19 will be required to isolate for five days following the onset of symptoms. These individuals can end isolation after five days if their symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours, and all public health and safety measures, such as masking and physical distancing, are followed

Individuals who are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated or immunocompromised will be required to isolate for 10 days.

All household contacts must also isolate for the same duration as the person with symptoms, regardless of their vaccination status. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you should also consider informing close contacts beyond your household contacts by providing them with the link to [Ontario.ca/exposed](https://www.ontario.ca/exposed).

If you have concerns about your symptoms, contact your doctor, health care provider or Telehealth for more information and guidance. If you develop severe symptoms requiring medical attention, such as shortness of breath or chest pain, call 911.

If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 but are feeling unwell, isolate until symptoms have improved for at least 24 hours.

If you've been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19

If you are fully vaccinated and you have no symptoms, you are advised to:

- [Self-monitor](#) for symptoms for 10 days since you last interacted with the positive case
- Maintain masking, physical distancing and adherence to all other public health measures if leaving home
- Do not visit any high-risk settings or individuals who may be at higher risk of illness (e.g., seniors) for 10 days from your last exposure.

If you are not fully vaccinated, or are immunocompromised, you must isolate immediately for 10 days following your last contact. If you live with the positive case, you must isolate for the length of their isolation period.

If you live, work, attend, volunteer, or have been admitted in a high-risk health care setting, you must notify your employer and should not visit the high-risk setting for 10 days since your last exposure or symptom onset, or from your date of diagnosis. To ensure sufficient staffing levels, workers in these settings will have the opportunity to return to work early on day seven of their isolation with a negative PCR test, or two negative rapid antigen tests on day six and seven. If you live in a high-risk setting, you should isolate regardless of vaccination status.

If you have COVID-19 based on a positive test result

If you test positive from a PCR, rapid molecular or a rapid antigen test and you are fully vaccinated or under 12 years of age, you must isolate for five days from the positive test result if you have no symptoms or from symptom onset and until their symptoms are improving for 24 hours (or 48 hours if gastrointestinal symptoms).

If you are partially vaccinated, unvaccinated or immunocompromised, you should self-isolate for 10 days from the onset of symptoms, or from the date of your test (whichever came sooner).

In addition, household contacts of individuals who have tested positive must also self-isolate during this time. Individuals must isolate regardless of their vaccination status.

You should also notify your close contacts. A close contact is anyone you were less than two metres away from for at least 15 minutes, or multiple shorter lengths of time, without personal protective equipment in the 48 hours before your symptoms began or your positive test result, whichever came first.

How to Access Supports While Isolating

If you require assistance while isolating, visit [COVID-19: Support for people](#). People can also contact their public health unit for many isolation supports including:

- Use of isolation facilities;
- Referral to community supports and agencies;
- [Mental health supports](#);
- Courier and delivery supports for food and necessities;
- Additional resources available to support isolation through the [High Priority Communities](#) strategy.