



January 14, 2022

Dear staff, students, parents, and caregivers

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) is committed to supporting in-person attendance for this winter 2022 semester. In-person learning is welcome news for many parents and caregivers, but we can understand that others may be concerned. We can appreciate that you may have many questions. OPH is working closely with the local school boards and as more information is confirmed by the provincial government, we will work with our partners to update families. Thank you for your patience and understanding as schools implement these changes.

Please read this letter carefully as it **explains key changes made by the Ontario government** and **provides important information** on topics including screening, isolation, and vaccination.

Self-screening for symptoms

To decrease the spread of COVID-19, **screen for symptoms daily and stay home when you or your child is sick**. Please use the [Ministry of Health's COVID-19 school and childcare screening tool](#) if you are a student, staff or a parent filling out the screening tool for your child.

Isolation

The isolation instructions have changed this year. In response to the rapidly spreading Omicron variant, the Ministry of Health updated the isolation requirements including **staying home from school/childcare if you or your child has even one symptom**. Please follow the instructions in the [screening tool](#) and visit [COVID-19: Stop the spread](#) to find information on isolation. In addition, OPH developed [this self-isolation flowchart](#) to help find out how long you or your child need to isolate. You may also visit OPH's [Information for those who have symptoms, test positive for COVID-19 and high-risk contacts](#).

Field Code Changed

COVID-19 Testing

Ottawa Public Health will be adapting to the new provincial guidance for schools and child care. The province announced on January 12 that **Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs)** will be available for schools and child care. **PCR home test kits may be** available in schools for elementary/secondary students and education staff who become symptomatic while at school. For more information, please visit [COVID-19 testing information](#).

COVID-19 Vaccines

Many people are now eligible for their first, second, or third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Visit [Getting the COVID-19 vaccine](#) to see if you or your child is eligible. **Appointments are available** for those who have not yet received their vaccine, with education workers being prioritized. Visit [COVID-19 Vaccine](#) or [COVID-19 Vaccination and Children 5 to 11 years old](#) for more information, and to book an appointment for you or your child.

Consent by a parent or guardian will be required for COVID-19 vaccination for children aged 5 to 11 at all OPH clinics. For more information on the consent or the online COVID-19 Vaccine Children/ Youth consent form, please visit [COVID-19 Vaccination and Children 5 to 11 years old](#). It is important to note that **all of the COVID-19 vaccines currently approved are effective at reducing the risk of serious illness, hospitalization, and death**, and will help control the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

Process for COVID-19 cases in schools

In general, updated provincial guidance no longer requires individuals exposed to COVID-19 at school to be dismissed as high-risk contacts where public health measures are in place. The Ministry of Education has committed to supporting schools with a broad range of health and safety measures, including stricter screening requirements, making non-fit tested N95 masks available to all education staff, ventilation improvements, additional cohorting protocols, and other restrictions to reduce contacts in the school.

Please read the following information related to this update:

1. **Please inform the school of your child's absences (or yours) regardless of the reason for the absence.**
2. Schools will monitor absenteeism rates and notify OPH if absenteeism rises to a defined level (approximately 30% above their baseline) in schools.
3. Any **dismissals or closures of a school** will be contingent on operational requirements determined by the school board and/or school.
4. **You will no longer get letters from OPH telling you that a person tested positive at school, or letters telling you that your child was a high-risk contact.**
5. **If you or your child tests positive on a PCR COVID-19 test**, you may be called by OPH. You do not need to call OPH.
 - o OPH will ask you to reach out to your high-risk contacts to notify them that they were exposed and may be required to self-isolate. Depending on the nature and frequency of interactions, this could include people at school (e.g., breakroom close unprotected contact; spending more time with a friend without a mask).
 - o Please see [information for those who have symptoms, test positive for COVID-19 and high-risk contacts](#) and how to [determine high-risk contacts](#).

Reach out for help

- Need help **paying for food and/or housing**? Visit [COVID-19: Support for people](#) to find help.
- Having trouble isolating safely in your own home? See Ottawa's [voluntary isolation centre](#) for more information.
- Trying to find the right **mental health and substance use health services** for you or your child? Visit [1Call1Click.ca](#) to get connected.
- If you **need immediate help**, call:
 - o The Ottawa Distress Line/ Help Line at 613-238-3311
 - o The Mental Health Crisis Line at 613-722-6914



Ongoing safety measures in addition to the updates shared above include wearing a well fitted 3-layer [mask](#) at school, keep physical distance as much as possible, and exercising [proper hand hygiene](#). Thank you for continuing to do your part during this COVID-19 pandemic and continuing to support each other as we face these challenging times together.

Sincerely,

Ottawa Public Health