

Main Office - Belleville

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hpePublicHealth.ca

December 3, 2021

To: All staff, students and parents/caregivers of school aged children in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties

Re: Enhanced school measures including screening will be required for staff and students, effective Tuesday, December 7

While infection prevention protocols and screening have helped limit the spread of COVID-19 in classrooms, we are now seeing an increase in the number of cases reported in elementary schools, as well as transmission within elementary schools. This is resulting in isolation of multiple cohorts and children and missed in-person learning opportunities. Unfortunately, isolation dates are now nearing the winter break and holiday celebrations, and can also affect access to COVID-19 vaccination since children who are isolated cannot attend their vaccination appointments.

Vaccination

In order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading in local elementary schools, parents of children aged 5 to 11 are strongly advised to book an appointment to get their child vaccinated. The impact of COVID-19 vaccination has proven beneficial as we are seeing very limited cases and spread in the secondary schools due to the immunity provided by vaccination. If your child is eligible for vaccination, please have them vaccinated as soon as possible. Vaccination is safe, effective, and it works.

- For more information about vaccination for children and youth, visit hpepublichealth.ca/covid-19-vaccines-youth/.
- To book an appointment for your child, visit covid19.ontariohealth.ca.

Enhanced screening – all symptoms of COVID-19

In order to keep our classrooms as safe as possible, enhanced symptom screening requirements will be in effect beginning on Tuesday, December 7, 2021. Our case investigations show that children are attending school while they have symptoms of illness, which is contributing to the spread of the virus. In addition, 27 per cent of local students (school aged) who have tested positive for COVID-19 since September have had symptoms that are not caught in the current screening tool, such as a runny nose, sore throat, headache, and more.

What symptoms will be included in enhanced screening?

To reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure within schools, enhanced screening will require that staff and students stay home from school if they have any of the symptoms listed below. Note,

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that this includes additional symptoms over and above what is included on the provincial screening tool.

Symptoms listed on Provincial School Screener	HPEPH Additional Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever (37.8°C/100°F) and/or chills • Cough or barking cough • Shortness of breath • Decrease or loss of taste or smell • Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea • Fatigue • Muscle aches and pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sore throat • Difficulty swallowing • Runny or stuffy nose • Abdominal pain • Headache • Conjunctivitis (pink eye) • Decreased or lack of appetite

How do I screen for all symptoms of COVID-19?

The Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) enhanced screening tool is available at hpepublichealth.ca/school-screening. A printable PDF version is also available.

What happens if staff/students have symptoms identified in the provincial or HPEPH screening tools?

Staff and students will not be permitted to attend school if they do not pass both the provincial and HPEPH screening tools. If these symptoms are identified while at school, the student/staff will be sent home until conditions of both provincial and HPEPH screening are met which are:

- their symptoms are improving AND they receive a negative COVID-19 test result; OR
- they have isolated for a minimum of 10 days and have been symptom free for 24 hours (48 hours for gastrointestinal symptoms); OR
- they have received an alternative diagnosis from a health care professional; AND
- pass the daily screener.

When is testing for COVID-19 required?

When symptoms are present, getting tested for COVID-19 is strongly recommended. Getting tested for COVID-19 will help identify whether symptoms are related to COVID-19, or another illness. If symptoms are related to COVID-19, the test result will also help ensure anyone else who may have been exposed can be notified, and isolate as required.

A negative COVID-19 test will help the student/staff return to school as quickly as possible – HOWEVER, even once a negative test is received, the symptomatic person must remain home until symptoms are improving **significantly** for 24 hours (48 hours for gastrointestinal symptoms). This helps reduce the risk of spreading illness to others in the school setting. If testing is recommended and not done, the staff/student must stay home for a minimum of 10 days.

Testing options have been expanded beyond community assessment centres to include take-home testing and testing at participating pharmacies. Please choose the testing option that is most convenient for you. Less invasive testing options are available upon request (at Community Assessment Centres, this must be requested at the time of booking, and booking must be made by phone). For testing options, visit hpePublicHealth.ca/getting-tested-for-covid-19/

Why are parents being asked to do this?

HPEPH recognizes it is inconvenient to keep your child home, but your choice to keep your child home when they have symptoms can help keep illness out of schools and keep other students as healthy as possible. Keeping your child home while they wait for test results may also help avoid the need to place a class of students in isolation for 10 days, which impacts many other families. As we approach the holiday season, keeping everyone healthy and safe should be a priority for all. Support is available for parents through the following:

- [WSIB](#) provides up to three days of protected, paid, leave from your employment to care for a sick child, or unpaid, protected time off to care for a child who must stay out of school due to COVID-19 protocols.
- [The Canada Recovery Caregiver Benefit](#) may be extended to provide support to caregivers in the coming months.

What will schools do?

School communities have been working diligently to keep your child(ren) as safe as possible throughout the pandemic. As cases of COVID-19 increase in the community, so does the risk of exposure within schools. In addition to enhanced screening, schools will also be implementing additional measures. While screening helps keep symptomatic individuals out of school, operational procedures will help keep students as safe as possible in the event someone attends school while contagious before their symptoms develop.

To help keep students safe, schools will continue:

- Current infection control protocols including cleaning, distancing, hand washing, and wearing masks.
- Enforcing COVID-19 screening.

In addition, schools will:

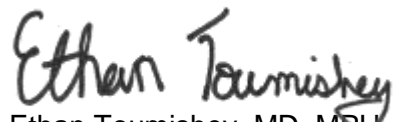
- Monitor for staff/students who are sent to school with other symptoms of COVID-19. If these symptoms are present, the individual will be sent home (unless the child has received a negative COVID-19 test result or alternate diagnosis since symptoms started).
- Require masking when outdoors, if cohorts are not maintained (elementary schools only).
- Require masking in JK/SK classrooms and school transportation

How long will these temporary measures be in place?

These measures will be in place until further notice. COVID-19 cases and vaccination rates in this age group will be closely monitored and will assist in determining next steps.

For more information about processes in place to protect your child in the classroom, visit hpePublicHealth.ca/back-to-school-planning-parents/.

Sincerely,



Ethan Toumishey, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCPC
Acting Medical Officer of Health
Hastings Prince Edward Public Health