

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS RETURN TO SCHOOL (JANUARY 2022)

Last revised: January 14, 2022

WHY ARE SCHOOLS RE-OPENING, WHEN THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IS SO HIGH?

Right now, COVID-19 is widespread in our communities, but we hope that this will be on the downswing soon. When there is COVID-19 in the community, there is a risk of COVID-19 in schools. Schools have many prevention measures in place to help reduce the risk to students, employees, and their families. Each added layer of protection helps to reduce the risk of getting COVID-19. Current data shows that vast majority of school aged children and youth who get COVID-19 have mild symptoms and, in most cases, will not have severe illness requiring hospitalization.

Attending school is important for children and youth to support their development and overall social, emotional, mental and physical health and well-being. Given the known negative effects that Ontario students have suffered because of the extended amounts of time away from in-person learning, the health unit recommends children return to in-person learning as much as possible. We understand that parents' decision on whether to have their children attend in-person learning may not be an easy one for some, given the current circumstances.

WHAT MEASURES ARE IN PLACE AT SCHOOL TO REDUCE THE RISK OF COVID-19?

There are many layers of protection available to help decrease the risk of your child and family getting COVID-19. There is no guaranteed way to prevent a COVID-19 infection but combining as many layers of protection as possible helps to further decrease the risk.

All students, school employees and visitors must complete the [COVID-19 School and Child Care Screening](#) every day before school.

- Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and isolate.
- Processes are in place to separate and care for students if they become sick at school, while waiting for parents to pick them up.
- Rapid antigen tests will also be made available (based on provincial supply).

Students in Grades 1 to 12 are required to wear a well-fitted cloth or medical mask indoors in school and on buses. Masking continues to be strongly recommended for kindergarten students. School employees and visitors must also wear personal protective equipment.

All publicly funded and private schools must follow [Ontario COVID-19 Health, safety and operational guidance for schools](#). The government has announced additional measures that will be put into place in January 2022, including: enhanced cohorting during recess and outdoor breaks, and pausing indoor high-contact and high-intensity extra-curricular activities (among others).

WHY IS PUBLIC HEALTH CHANGING HOW CASES ARE MANAGED IN SCHOOLS?

The way we used to investigate individual school cases and contacts is no longer an effective method to contain the virus given that it is widespread in the community. Additionally, we are unable to investigate all COVID cases given the high volume of cases and the change in provincial guidance on who is eligible for PCR testing. Public health units in Ontario are now needing to prioritize individuals and settings at highest risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19, such as in Long-term care homes.

Health unit staff will continue to work closely with school boards and schools across Simcoe Muskoka to monitor illness and absenteeism and to provide additional recommendations (if needed) to further reduce the risk of COVID-19 to students, staff, and families.

WHY ARE SCHOOLS NOT CONSIDERED HIGH RISK?

For most school aged children and youth, COVID-19 causes mild symptoms and, in most cases, will not cause a severe illness requiring hospitalization. People who are most at risk include those who are in hospital care and long-term care settings, as well as those who have weakened immune systems and chronic diseases.

SHOULD I INTENTIONALLY EXPOSE MY CHILD TO COVID-19?

No. Even though the Omicron variant causes milder illness, this does not mean you should actively seek to get a COVID-19 infection. Having had COVID-19 does not necessarily protect your child from getting it again, especially as the virus mutates.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS RETURN TO SCHOOL (JANUARY 2022)

Your child will still need to isolate if they experience any COVID-19-like symptoms even if they have already had it. Though many children and adults contracting the Omicron variant will not experience severe illness there is no guarantee that your child will have a mild case without complications such as myocarditis (inflammation of the heart), hospitalization or long COVID (symptoms for weeks/months after).

The most effective way to build immunity against COVID-19 is to get vaccinated. Children and youth (aged 5+) are eligible to get vaccinated. Currently, the majority (almost 80%) of youth aged 12-18 have received two doses of the COVID vaccine. Many children aged 5-11 in Simcoe Muskoka have received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Everyday more are getting vaccinated and by the 3rd week of January the first children to become vaccinated will be able to get their second dose at the recommended 8 week interval.

For more information about where your child can receive their first, second or booster vaccinations, visit [SMDHU's Getting Vaccinated webpage](#).

I HAVE MORE QUESTIONS. WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

For more information about some of the most common topics, check out the health unit website:

- [Where do I find information about my child going to school during the 2021-2022 school year?](#)
- [Where do I find the current COVID-19 School and Child Care Screening Tool?](#)
- [What if my child has developed symptoms in the last 5-10 days?](#)
- [What if my child tested positive for COVID-19?](#)
- [What if my child has symptoms not listed on the COVID-19 screening tool?](#)
- [What if my child is exposed to someone with COVID-19?](#)
- [Where do I get information about using rapid antigen tests?](#)
- [What if a child develops symptoms at school?](#)
- [What if there is someone that has tested positive or have COVID-like symptoms at my child's school?](#)