

# SMDHU: COVID-19 SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDANCE DOCUMENT FOR SCHOOL SETTINGS

Last revised: December 4, 2020

This document provides supplemental guidance to reduce the risk of introducing and spreading COVID-19 in public and private schools in Simcoe and Muskoka. It should be used in conjunction with complete guidance provided in the [Ministry of Education's Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools](#) and the [Ministry of Health's COVID 19 Guidance: School Outbreak Management](#) and [the Ministry of Education's Operational Guidance: COVID 19 Management in Schools](#). If not already indicated below, ***Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) guidance that differs from or enhances Ministry guidance is bolded and italicized throughout this document*** and is subject to change. Please visit the [SMDHU website](#) regularly for updates and additional guidance. Questions regarding the Ministry of Education documents should be referred directly to the Ministry for clarification/direction.

## SCREENING

All individuals including students, staff and essential visitors must self-screen each day before entering the school and/or child care setting. ***The SMDHU has adapted the Ontario COVID-19 Screening Tool for Children in School and Child Care (Version 1 – October 1, 2020) based on the local context in Simcoe Muskoka.***

***All students, parents/guardians, school and child care employees and essential visitors are advised to use and follow the guidance that these local tools provide:***

- [SMDHU COVID-19 Student Screening Tool](#) is available for students and parents/guardians completing screening on behalf of students. Students/children that are screened prior to attending child care programs do not need to be re-screened for school on the same day. Similarly, a student/child who has been screened for school does not need to be re-screened prior to attending child care.
- [SMDHU COVID-19 School and Child Care Staff/Visitor Screening Checklist](#) is also available for use by employees (e.g. teachers, office staff, custodians, bus drivers, etc.) and visitors.

***Schools and child care settings in Simcoe Muskoka are advised to use these locally adapted screening tools, in place of the Ontario COVID-19 Screening Tool for Children in School and Child Care (Version 1 – October 1, 2020).***

**Specific guidance for students, staff and/or visitors experiencing symptoms:**

- **All students, who have any *new or worsening* symptoms listed in the SMDHU COVID-19 Student Screening Tool (not related to a pre-existing known cause or condition), must stay home from school and should follow the advice listed in the screening tool.** They are also responsible to inform the school and/or child care of their absence due to illness, as per established processes.
  - Depending on the child's symptoms, parents/guardians may be asked to monitor for 24 hours to see if symptoms worsen OR their child may need to isolate (stay home) and visit an assessment centre for testing and seek medical advice, if required. Families should refer to the SMDHU COVID-19 Student Screening Tool and follow the advice provided.
- **All staff and visitors who have any *new or worsening* symptoms listed in the SMDHU COVID-19 Screening Tool for School or Child Care Employees and Visitors (not related to a pre-existing known cause or condition), must stay home from school and should follow the advice listed in the screening tool.** They are also responsible to inform the school and/or child care of their absence due to illness, as per established processes.
- **Where the advice is to be tested for COVID-19 and/or seek medical advice, if required:**
  - Testing is encouraged locally as it is difficult for health care providers to distinguish between COVID-19 and other viral illnesses for which we do not have tests.

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- If results are returned as negative, staff and visitors are able to return if all of the following apply:
  - They do not have a fever (without using medication), **AND**
  - It has been at least 24 hours since their symptoms started improving, **AND**
  - They were not in close physical contact with someone who currently has COVID-19.
- If the student, parent/guardian, staff/visitor feels there is another explanation for the new symptom(s) requiring medical assessment rather than a COVID-19 test, they should contact their health care provider as usual. Some COVID-19 assessment centres will also do a medical assessment in addition to COVID-19 testing. If the health care provider makes an alternative diagnosis and determines that the condition is not COVID-19, the individual can return to school once it has been at least 24 hours since symptoms started improving.
  - ***If the alternative diagnosis is clearly non-infectious then the individual can return to school prior to symptom improvement.***
- For individuals with symptoms compatible with COVID-19 who do not undergo testing OR receive an alternative diagnosis, they must self-isolate for 10 days from symptom onset (even if symptoms resolve). After self-isolating for 10 days, they may return to school if they have been at least 24 hours without a fever and symptoms are improving. It is difficult for a health care provider to rule out COVID-19 without a test, if there is not a clear alternative diagnosis.
- Medical documentation or proof of a negative test result is not required to return to school; **however, employers may request the staff/visitor complete an attestation form, for safe return to school. A sample [attestation form](#) is available on SMDHU's website.**
- Any household members of the ill individual are to self-monitor for 14 days. These household contacts can continue to come to school, as long as they have not developed symptoms themselves and their ill household member has not been diagnosed with COVID-19.
  - ***This recommendation for household contacts to self-monitor may be changed in future by the Ministry of Health and/or SMDHU to self-isolate if warranted by increased rates of local COVID-19 transmission.***
- If someone answers yes to any of the other screening questions, they should follow the direction provided in the SMDHU screening tool.

## ISOLATION AND MANAGEMENT OF ILL INDIVIDUALS AT SCHOOL

Follow guidance per Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education documents linked in the introduction. The following is in addition to that guidance:

- Follow SMDHU's [When COVID-19 Symptoms Develop at School or Child Care](#) protocol for when a child/student, staff or visitor develops symptoms of COVID-19.
  - Staff attending to a symptomatic student should wear appropriate PPE including at a minimum a medical mask and eye protection. Where possible, anyone who is providing care to the student should maintain a distance of 2 metres.
  - If appropriate PPE is not worn, staff providing direct care for the ill student may need to be off for 14 days, if the child tests positive.

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## CASE & OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT

- Please refer to SMDHU's [School Protocol: When a COVID-19 Outbreak is Declared](#).
- Where there is sufficient concern that an individual may have COVID-19 (e.g. school is informed by a parent/guardian that a student has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or informed by a staff that they have been diagnosed with COVID-19), or there are concerns about multiple ill individuals in a cohort, the school should report this to SMDHU immediately. Note: SMDHU also receives lab reports directly on all positive COVID-19 cases.
- SMDHU will manage individual cases and outbreaks of COVID-19 in school settings including providing direction on communications with staff, visitors, students and families.
- Management of an individual case or an outbreak in a school will be based on an individual risk assessment by SMDHU at the time, and informed by the [Ministry of Health's COVID 19 Guidance: School Outbreak Management](#). Control measures could include:
  - Identification and exclusion (if applicable) of contacts
  - Dismissal of case's cohort (e.g. classroom, school bus, before/after program) or multiple cohorts as needed for various lengths of time
  - Recommendations for increasing environmental cleaning and further limiting of activities
  - Recommendations for testing of contacts (staff and students), including those with no symptoms
  - Enhanced surveillance recommendations
- An outbreak in a school is defined as two or more lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases in students and/or staff (or other visitors) with an epidemiological link, within a 14-day period, where at least one case could have reasonably acquired their infection\* in the school (including transportation and before/after school care).

\*Examples of reasonably having acquired infection in school include:

- No obvious source of infection outside of the school setting; OR
- Known exposure in the school setting

## Personal Protective Equipment for staff/visitors

The Ministry of Education has directed that all staff in a school are required to wear medical masks while inside the school, including in hallways. **SMDHU also recommends the wearing of eye protection (e.g. face shield) at all times, in addition to medical masks;** it provides additional protection for staff as it can be difficult to anticipate being within 2 metres of others, and it lessens the likelihood of a staff member needing to be off work in the event of exposure to a COVID-19 case. Reasonable exceptions to the requirement to wear masks will be put in place by administrators.

Please contact the Health Connection if you have any questions at 1-877-721-7520 ext. 5830, Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturdays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or email [schoolhealth@smdhu.org](mailto:schoolhealth@smdhu.org)