

COVID-19: Update #21 School & Child Care Reopening

Attention: Physicians, Emergency Departments, Infection Control Practitioners, Nurse Practitioners, Occupational Health Practitioners, Walk-In Clinics/Urgent Care Clinics, EMS, Midwives, Designated Officers, Family Health Teams, Pharmacies, Central LHIN, NSM LHIN, Beausoleil First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation, Rama First Nation, Wahta First Nation, Long-term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, Hospices

Date: August 20, 2020

As announced by the Ministry of Education, schools across Simcoe Muskoka will be opening on September 8th. In addition, licensed child care centres will be able to operate at full capacity as of September 1st. In preparation, the Ontario Ministry of Health has provided a [Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools](#) and [Guide to Child Care Re-Opening](#) that contain detailed activities developed to support the safe reopening of schools and child care centres for the 2020-2021 school year. Both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education are also expected to provide outbreak protocols shortly that will guide our response in school and child care settings.

Masking Requirement & Medical Exemptions

Of note, all children from Grade 4-12 will be required to wear non-medical masks (face coverings) in school and during before/after school child care. All staff (school-based or child care-based) will be supplied with, and required to, wear medical masks and have the option to use eye protection as well. There will be reasonable exceptions for medical conditions of both staff and students. **We have shared with local school boards and child care operators that proof of a medical exemption by a health care provider is not required.**

Communication to Parents

Parents and guardians have many questions about their child's return to school and we have shared the following [letter](#) with parents in Simcoe Muskoka to support their decision-making. We hope this will also provide you with key messages to support families during this challenging time. You will note that parents and guardians are advised to consult with their health care provider should they be concerned about the health conditions of their child, themselves or close family members and the risks associated with COVID-19.

To support parents, administrators and educators we have created a [Return to School](#) section of our website under COVID-19. You are welcome to direct your patients to this resource. They can also be directed to our COVID-19 phone line which is accessible from Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. and Saturdays from 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Screening & Testing

As per current recommendations set out by the Ministry of Education, staff and students/attendees will be required to self-screen daily prior to school attendance. Screening will include new onset of COVID-19 symptoms (including atypical symptoms for children), history of international travel and being a close contact of a case. The recommendation for any symptomatic staff/child failing a screen will be to seek testing at a local assessment centre.

As noted in the COVID-19: Update #20 Health Fax, it is important for children attending school or child care settings who display symptoms consistent with COVID-19 be tested for the purposes of early detection, prevention and control of outbreaks, and surveillance in those settings; and remain in self-isolation until they receive a negative test result. Even with atypical symptom presentation and low prevalence in the community, or low clinical likelihood in some children, we encourage testing where possible. Once schools reopen any student or staff with symptoms of COVID-19, should be excluded from school/work until a negative test is received and symptoms resolved. If testing is not sought, students and staff may be recommended to be excluded for 14 days from onset of illness.

In line with the [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#) document, routine asymptomatic testing of staff and students is not recommended unless indicated by public health.



Local Epidemiology & Reporting

The most current case counts for laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) region are available at [Simcoe Muskoka Health Stats](#) ⁱ.

All suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 must be reported to SMDHU. To report a suspect or confirmed case of COVID-19, please contact the Infectious Diseases team at (705) 721-7520 extension 8809 during business hours (Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.) or after hours at 1-888-225-7851.

There are a number of other resources and documents available through our Health Professional Portal at www.smdhu.org/hportal as well as through [Public Health Ontario](#) ⁱⁱ and the [Government of Ontario](#).ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ <http://www.simcoemuskokahealthstats.org/topics/infectious-diseases/a-h/covid-19>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx.