



Office of the Medical Officer of Health
Public Health Services
Healthy and Safe Communities Dept.
City of Hamilton
110 King Street West, 2nd Floor
Hamilton, Ontario L8P 4S6
COVID-19 Hotline: (905) 974-9848

August 19, 2020

RE: School Reopening Communication

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The decision to send your child to school is a personal choice, where the risks and benefits of returning to school should be considered along with your family's situation. Children will benefit from returning to school in many ways. A return to school is good for children's education, development and wellbeing. It will benefit the whole family. As we open up more spaces for people to gather (like schools), it is likely that cases of COVID-19 will occur. The goal is to minimize the risks and be aware all cases cannot be prevented. Maintaining public health measures like staying home when you are sick, physical distancing, hand washing and mask wearing will be very important to reduce the likelihood of infection, contain outbreaks and protect those who are most vulnerable.

Everyone has a part to play to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, including parents, school boards, and public health. As a parent/guardian, part of your role will be to decide whether your child returns to school in-person. There is no right or wrong decision. Decisions will differ between families, based on their unique situation. In order to make an informed decision to send your child to school in-person, consider how the following situations apply to your family:

Your Child's Health Conditions

Does your child have any medical conditions that may make them more vulnerable or prone to severe disease or complications if they get COVID-19? Mostly, children infected with COVID-19 have a very mild illness and recover at home without much help. A very small number of children experience a severe inflammatory disease, with little known about what puts some children at risk for this condition. What is assumed is that children with underlying medical conditions may be more at risk. For example, lung diseases like cystic fibrosis, cancer that may reduce their immune system or diabetes that isn't well controlled. Talk to your child's health care provider about any conditions that might put them at greater risk if they were to get COVID-19. If your child is very medically fragile or at higher risk for severe outcomes, returning to in-person school right now may not be the safest option. For most children, the benefits of being in school will outweigh the risks of them remaining at home.

Your Child's Contacts and Their Health Conditions

Most people with COVID-19 will recover at home and without help, however, some people are at higher risk for severe outcomes, such as older adults over 70, people

living with chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease or who have weakened immune systems. These people may need extra protection if you are living together in the same household. If there is a vulnerable person in your household, you will need to consider the risk of contracting COVID-19 for that person against the important benefits of sending your child to school. This important decision is again unique to your family and should consider all factors.

Your Role if Your Child/Children Return to School

To help lower the risk, you can create a family isolation plan to keep sick children away from the vulnerable person in your house and reduce contact with other social networks that could expose them to disease. As well, you will be responsible to follow school protocols, such as:

- Daily screening of your child(ren) for symptoms using a tool as directed by your school board;
- Keeping your child at home if they are ill or have symptoms and report illness to school;
- Drop off and pick up of your child outside the school at the designated area;
- Prompt pick up your child, should they become ill at school; and,
- Arranging for COVID-19 testing if you child becomes ill or has symptoms.

Your School Board's Role in Reopening Safely

Your school is committed to creating a caring and safe learning environment. Keeping community transmission low is key to keeping schools safer, and although there are no specific thresholds that define when a school should be closed, school boards and public health will work together to decide on the status of schools. Guided by the Ministry of Education and supported by local public health, school boards are putting in place key infection prevention and control measures to support student and staff safety, such as:

- Screening to ensure sick children and staff do not attend;
- Prompt isolation of sick children and staff on premises with supervision;
- Contacting parents/guardians of sick children for immediate pick up;
- Physical distancing to the extent possible;
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting measures ;
- Student cohorting (keeping groups together) to the extent possible;
- Mandatory use of face coverings for most students and staff.

Your Local Public Health Unit's Role in Reopening Safely

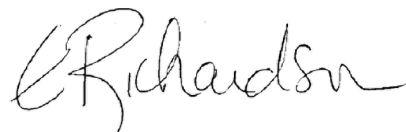
Public health has been in contact with school boards continuously through the pandemic. In order to support a safe return to school and to reduce community spread of COVID-19, the City of Hamilton's Public Health Services, following the directions and

guidelines developed by the Ministry of Health, is committed to ongoing support of schools as they reopen to:

- Consult on infection prevention and control measures and policies;
- Provide Public Health nursing staff to work with schools;
- Deliver school training sessions and related education;
- Develop and distribute school and parent resources;
- Advise and support administration on probable and confirmed cases of COVID-19; and,
- Work with and direct administration, should an outbreak occur, around:
 - Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting procedures;
 - Additional testing or self-isolation is required, for close contacts (e.g. staff/students); and,
 - Determining if additional protocols are required to be put in place.

Should you or your family have any questions regarding the safe reopening of schools, please contact your local Board of Education or the City of Hamilton's COVID-19 Hotline at 905-974-9848 or phscovid19@hamilton.ca.

Sincerely,



Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, MD, MHSc, FRCPC

Medical Officer of Health

Public Health Services – Office of the Medical Officer of Health

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