

From:	OSBCU Info <info@osbcu.ca>
To:	
Date:	Thu, Oct 28, 2021 14:24
Subject:	Expanded COVID-19 Testing Strategy for Ontario Schools   Mise à jour : Expansion de la stratégie de dépistage de la COVID-19 dans les écoles de l'Ontario
Attachments:	image001.jpg

**Memorandum to:** Chairs of District School Boards  
Directors of Education  
School Authorities

**From:** Stephen Lecce  
Minister of Education

Nancy Naylor  
Deputy Minister

**Subject:** **Update: Expanded COVID-19 Testing Strategy for Ontario Schools**

---

As the 2021-22 school year progresses, we remain committed to providing students and staff with a safe environment where they can continue to grow and develop.

The ministry has taken steps to provide testing in an easy and accessible manner through multiple approaches (e.g. assessment centres and community testing sites), with a focus on reducing barriers to access and recognizing the unique needs of certain communities and geographies. This approach has been guided by the best medical expertise of local public health units and the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

We are providing an update on the testing strategy for schools, including two new testing approaches that are being made available to school communities.

The testing supports outlined in this memo will also be offered to all private schools and First Nations schools.

These new approaches, which are described in the memo below, include:

- Expanding the deployment of Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) self-collection kits to all publicly funded schools across the province. Both symptomatic students and exposed/close contact asymptomatic students and staff will be able to access PCR home collection kits at school and drop them off at convenient locations in the community. This program builds on the existing asymptomatic take-home PCR collection kit pilot in place today.
- Launching a “test-to-stay” approach in schools to avoid whole-school dismissal, which may otherwise be the recommended course of action.

The government’s testing strategy in schools is grounded in guidance from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and supports close collaboration between local Public Health Units, schools, and Ontario Health.

School boards should be working with their local Public Health Units to communicate available testing options to students and staff.

### **1. Update on Staff Rapid Antigen Screening**

As you are aware, instructions issued by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) required all publicly-funded school boards to have a COVID-19 vaccination disclosure policy in place and fully implemented by September 27, 2021, that requires individuals to provide proof of:

1. Full vaccination against COVID-19; or,
2. A documented medical exemption; or,
3. Participation in an educational session on the benefits of COVID-19 immunization.

Based on school board reporting data, there are still school board employees (including occasional staff) who have not yet responded to their employer to indicate which stream of the policy will apply to them. Further, a number of employees have attested to being fully vaccinated but have not provided proof.

As of November 10, 2021, individuals subject to testing requirements **must now provide verification of negative test results three times per week** as an added measure to protect schools from the risk of COVID-19. We ask that you share this requirement with all affected staff immediately.

For individuals who are covered by a school board’s immunization disclosure policy but are less frequently in direct contact with students and/or staff, frequent testing may not be possible or

reasonable. In these cases, the individual must complete a rapid antigen test as part of screening and demonstrate a negative test result, prior to entering the school premises.

As a reminder, school boards are required to have a verification and reporting system in place per the Letter of Instructions.

For school boards that would like to use the Thrive Health app, please register your school board via the CDL registration [link](#). As part of the onboarding and set-up process, once registered, CDL will provide a link to attend a kick-off webinar in the language you registered in. Please connect with CDL directly if you have any questions.

If school boards choose to implement an alternative verification approach, there are additional reporting requirements to the Ministry of Health (MOH). As a first step, school boards that wish to opt out of the Thrive App should notify the Ministry of Education through their appropriate regional office contact. Boards will be asked to provide their organization name, address, as well as a key contact and contact information. These school boards would then be onboarded to the Health Data Collection Service, to submit their data directly to the Ministry of Health.

If your school board has not implemented the Thrive App, please connect with your regional office by **November 2, 2021** to confirm what verification process is being used and how the school board is meeting expectations for verification.

To support rapid antigen screening for unvaccinated staff, the first shipments of kits were deployed to school boards and certain schools through the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS) distribution network. Re-orders are currently being consolidated to include supplies for the child care centres to be supported by each school. Ongoing replenishments will be managed through the PPE order form from MGCS.

The Ministry of Education is committed to ensuring students and staff have the best protection against COVID-19. As outlined in the ministry's guidance, school boards are responsible for ensuring their compliance with the instructions issued by the OCMOH. School boards are also required to determine appropriate next steps in circumstances where individuals are not complying with vaccine disclosure policies, in accordance with their respective human resource policies and legal obligations.

## **2. Rapid Antigen Screening for Students**

As per the memo sent on October 5, 2021, **COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Screening for Students and Children in Schools and Child Care**, the use of rapid antigen screening will be deployed in regions of the province where there is a heightened risk of potential COVID-19 spread.

Local public health units (PHUs) can offer and ship rapid antigen tests for screening to select schools in their communities at a frequency and duration defined by the public health unit.

## **3. "Test to Stay": Rapid Antigen Screening Testing Program**

Building on the current approach for rapid antigen screening for students, and where supported by local PHUs, tests may also now be deployed to support continued in-person learning for non-exposed cohorts both in elementary and secondary schools to prevent whole school/child care dismissal. This approach aims to reduce absenteeism and learning disruption for elementary and secondary students.

Under this initiative, rapid antigen screening tests will be made available to schools, at the direction of PHUs, for use among asymptomatic students who are not identified as high-risk contacts of a confirmed case of COVID-19 but who are attending a school where one or more cases of COVID-19 have been identified and where other cohorts have been dismissed. Student participation is voluntary, but a minimum of 60% participation in all participating cohorts is required. Students who are symptomatic or identified as high-risk contacts would still be required to access PCR testing, either at a local assessment centre, community lab, or through take-home self-collection kits, once available, and would need to self-isolate according to the guidance outlined in [Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario \(gov.on.ca\)](https://www.ontario.ca/gov/docs/management-cases-contacts-covid-19).

Participating students should conduct rapid antigen screening at home. The recommended testing frequency is every other school day until all tests in the kit have been used (i.e. 5 tests per kit, e.g. on M/W/F/M/W or Tu/Th/M/W/F). PHUs will determine the appropriate duration of rapid antigen screening and can deploy additional kits to non-exposed cohorts as needed (e.g. could distribute a second kit to each participant).

Tests used for this initiative will be provided and are packaged in convenient boxes of five (5), which enables children to receive an individual box of tests for at-home screening. There is no need to create “mini” test kits.

Students who have received direction to do rapid antigen screening in these circumstances are only allowed to attend school if they have a negative result. If a student tests positive, they must follow their local public health guidance, stay home from school and get a PCR test (which is also available to them through the PCR self-collection kit) as soon as possible to confirm the result.

For #2 and #3 above, your local PHU will provide further information should rapid antigen screening be recommended for schools within your school board. School boards should not order or distribute any rapid antigen screening tests for students at this time. Your

PHU will order tests when deemed appropriate, and they will be sent directly to the school. Alternative test types will be made available by your PHU for this situation.

Schools will be required to work closely with their PHU(s) to facilitate reporting of aggregate, de-identified data on test usage on a weekly basis to the Ministry of Health; however, students will not be required to report to schools or school boards. Instead, test usage data will be reported to the overseeing PHU.

#### **4. COVID-19 Pilot Project for Secondary Schools**

The Ministry launched a PCR self-collection pilot project for targeted secondary schools in September. Through this pilot program, take-home self-collection kits are distributed to staff and students in targeted secondary schools who are vaccinated, asymptomatic and identified by PHUs as high-risk close contacts of a confirmed case of COVID-19.

The duration of this pilot will be extended for participating schools until late-November under the same terms. Following completion of the pilot, participating schools will be expected to shift to the broader PCR self-collection program outlined below.

School boards that are currently participating in this pilot initiative will receive specific instructions from the Ministry to be shared with participating school sites regarding recalling unused self-collection kits at the end of the pilot.

## **5. PCR Self-Collection**

Building on the PCR self-collection pilot, and to further facilitate timely access to testing, we are pleased to announce a province-wide expansion of the PCR self-collection program, to all elementary and secondary schools.

Under this expanded initiative, students and school staff will be able to access PCR self-collection kits at school and drop them off at a convenient locations in the community. This testing option will be made available to both symptomatic students as well as asymptomatic high-risk contacts/exposed cohorts, including students and staff. This is in addition to the PCR testing that continues to be available through community-based testing sites (e.g. assessment centres, community labs, etc.).

Shipping of PCR self-collection kits to schools will begin in mid-November. The Ministry will provide each school with PCR self-collection kits equal to 10% of student enrolment. Schools/boards that already receive PCR self-collection kits through programs facilitated by hospitals will continue to be supported through that local model.

The Ministry of Education will be sharing further information on implementation and will also provide updates at regionally scheduled meetings led by Field Services Branch.

Thank you again for your ongoing partnership as we continue to ensure the safety of students and staff in this unprecedented school year.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce  
Minister

Nancy Naylor  
Deputy Minister

- c: Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario
- President, Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario (ACÉPO)
- Executive Director, Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario (ACÉPO)
- President, Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)
- Executive Director, Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)
- President, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA)
- Executive Director, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA)
- President, Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
- Executive Director, Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
- Executive Director, Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)
- President, Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO)
- Executive Director and Secretary-Treasurer, Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO)
- President, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)
- General Secretary, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)
- President, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
- General Secretary, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
- President, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)
- General Secretary, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)
- Chair, Ontario Council of Educational Workers (OCEW)
- Chair, Education Workers' Alliance of Ontario (EWAO)
- President of OSBCU, Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario (CUPE-ON)
- Co-ordinator, Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario (CUPE-ON)
- Executive Director, Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO)
- Executive Director, Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO)
- Executive Director, Ontario Principals' Council (OPC)

**Disclaimer**

Confidentiality Warning: This message is confidential and intended solely for the individual(s) or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error, please delete this message and any attachments. If you are not the intended recipient, you are notified that any review, re-transmission, conversion to hard copy, copying, circulation or other use of this message and any attachments is strictly prohibited.