

February 17, 2021

**Memorandum to:** Directors of Education  
School Authorities

**From:** Nancy Naylor  
Deputy Minister of Education

**Subject:** Ministry of Education Updates: Revised School and Child  
Care Screener and Updated Health and Safety Measures

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Thank you for your continued support for students, families and staff.

The government is committed to student learning and the safety and well being of all staff and students. Our priority continues to be keeping schools open and safe. As such, the purpose of this memo is to provide you with updated guidance that builds upon a number of public health and safety measures as outlined below, specifically:

1. The provincial school and child care screener
2. Isolation requirements for household members
3. Use of gymnasiums and weight rooms

### **1. Provincial school and child care screener**

All students, children and staff are required to screen for symptoms of illness every day before coming to school or child care. As part of our efforts to strengthen health and safety measures and update guidance to reflect provincial trends and transmission risks, the government is making changes to the COVID-19 school and child care screening criteria.

This includes new provincial direction that staff, students and children with **any new or worsening symptom** of COVID-19, as indicated in the school and child care screening tool, even those with only one symptom, must stay home until:

- They receive a negative COVID-19 test result.
- They receive an alternative diagnosis by a health care professional, or
- It has been 10 days since their symptom onset and they are feeling better.

Schools in some public health units have been applying the single symptom screening criteria. The Chief Medical Officer of Health has now directed that the single-symptom screening criteria be applied province-wide.

The provincial screening tool is being updated to reflect this direction.

We encourage you to continue to work with your local public health unit to align your screening tool with the updated provincial tool and guidance and any additional guidance provided by your local public health unit based on local risk factors.

As a reminder, secondary students and staff are now required to provide daily confirmation/proof of having self-screened prior to or upon their arrival. Any individual that does not pass this on-site screening procedure will be asked to return home and self-isolate until they meet the criteria for return.

## **2. Isolation requirement for household contacts of symptomatic individuals**

As of February 12, the Ministry of Health has issued guidance to public health units regarding COVID-19 variants of concern (*COVID-19 Variant of Concern: Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance, Version 2.0 – February 12, 2021*), requiring all household contacts of symptomatic individuals to quarantine.

Through this memo, this guidance is being applied to staff, students and children by requiring them to stay home from school or child care if anyone in their household has new or worsening symptoms of COVID-19 and has been recommended for isolation and testing.

All asymptomatic household contacts of symptomatic individuals are required to quarantine until the symptomatic household member:

- receives a negative COVID-19 test result, or
- receives an alternative diagnosis by a health care professional

If the symptomatic individual **tests positive**, or is **not tested** and does not receive an alternative diagnosis from a health care professional, the symptomatic individual must isolate (including from household members) for 10 days from symptom onset, and all household contacts must isolate until 14 days from their last contact with the symptomatic individual.

These updates will be included in the provincial school and child care screener.

## **3. Use of gymnasiums and weight rooms**

The *Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools* states that in elementary and applicable secondary Health and Physical Education courses, efforts should be made to address the overall expectations of the Active Living and Movement Competence strands outside, whenever possible. Building on guidance from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, students and staff should not be engaged in moderate to vigorous physical activity indoors. When moderate to vigorous physical activity takes place outdoors, students and staff should maintain physical distancing. Masks should not be worn for high intensity activity.

Gymnasiums should only be used for moderate activity where physical distancing and current masking protocols can be followed for staff and students. Change rooms should only be used when absolutely necessary and capacity should be limited to accommodate physical distancing.

As teachers plan physical activities that support physical distancing, plans should include masking for students and staff in indoor settings as well as outdoors when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Efforts should be made to limit the use of shared equipment. Shared equipment should be disinfected regularly and students and staff should practice proper hand hygiene before and after participating in physical activity and equipment use. This includes the use of weight rooms that should not be used by students and staff unless disinfected between use, and solely for the purposes of student learning and programming. School gymnasiums and weight rooms should not be used for personal use by staff, either during or outside of regular instructional hours.

At this time, sanitizing outdoor structures on playgrounds is not required but rather, schools should focus on maintaining distance, limiting total gathering size on playgrounds and masking protocols when physical distancing cannot be maintained.

The *Guide to Reopening Ontario's Schools* provides that adaptations may be needed for some subjects/courses to ensure the safety of students, in line with current public health recommendations, including adaptations to Health and Physical Education courses to allow students to earn credits and progress to the next grade.

The measures outlined in this memo constitute updates to the return to school direction issued by the Ministry of Education and approved by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Updates to the [Operational Guidance: COVID-19 management in schools](#) and the [COVID-19 school and child care screening](#) tool will be posted shortly to reflect these changes.

We recognize that these are significant requests and appreciate that these changes will require additional communication with schools and school communities.

These changes build on other health and safety measures in place to ensure the safety of children and their families along with all education and child care staff.

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

Sincerely,

Nancy Naylor  
Deputy Minister

c: Board COVID-19 Leads

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