

# MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Parents of Children JK-12

**FROM:** Dr. Mustafa Hirji, MD MPH FRCPC

**SUBJECT:** Active Screening, Testing, Mask Requirements

**DATE:** September 22, 2021

Thank you for your ongoing efforts and dedication to keeping children of Niagara safe. As we start a new school year, protecting the health, safety and well-being of all children in schools and childcare continues to be our priority. For best protection, we continue to recommend vaccination to all those individuals who are eligible.<sup>1</sup>

## ACTIVE SCREENING

Before school entry, every staff, student, visitor, and contractor who enters the school setting are required to complete active screening for COVID-19 symptoms and schools are required to monitor such compliance. **Only individuals who have completed and passed the screening tool will be allowed to enter the school.**

## SCREENING TOOL

If a child, staff member or visitor are experiencing any of the following symptoms they are not allowed to enter the school:

Symptom	Action
From the <a href="#">Ministry screening tool</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fever/chills</li> <li>New cough or a cough that is getting worse</li> <li>Shortness of breath (even when sitting or walking regularly)</li> <li>Nausea/Vomiting, diarrhea or loss of appetite</li> <li>Loss of sense of taste and/or smell</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-isolate immediately</li> <li>Contact the Niagara Health COVID-19 Assessment Centre to book an appointment for testing; this can be done <a href="#">on-line</a> or by calling 905-378-4647 ext. 42819. <b>OR</b></li> <li>Contact their health care provider for a medical assessment if symptoms are due to a another condition</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Runny nose and/or nasal congestion</li> <li>Sore throat</li> <li>Unusual level of fatigue (feeling weak, tired, exhausted)</li> <li>Feeling unwell for an unknown reason</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remain home from school until their symptoms have resolved or are improving for 24 hours.</li> <li>A COVID-19 test is recommended prior to returning to school.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Ontario Makes COVID-19 Vaccination Policies Mandatory for High-Risk Settings. Government of Ontario. August 17, 2021. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1000750/ontario-makes-covid-19-vaccination-policies-mandatory-for-high-risk-settings>.

If anyone develops symptoms while at school, they must immediately isolate from others, in a separate room if possible, until they can go home.

## **VACCINATION AND SYMPTOMS**

If an individual has a fever or develops symptoms that persist longer than 48 hours, the individual must self-isolate immediately and get tested for COVID-19. If the individual develops any of the following symptoms within forty-eight hours of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, they may continue to attend school or childcare as long as they wear a medical grade mask:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Muscle Ache
- Joint pain

For any other symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell), even if they are mild, the child is to self-isolate immediately and get tested.

## **TESTING AND RETURN TO SCHOOL**

Symptomatic individuals who **test negative** for COVID-19, or receive an alternate diagnosis by a health care provider, can return to school when:

- They have been free of fever for over twenty-four hours **and**
- They have been free of vomiting or diarrhea for forty-eight hours **and**
- Other symptoms have mostly improved for at least twenty-four hours **and**
- They have not been directed to self-isolate **and**
- Have had no contact to a confirmed case of COVID-19

**Note:** If symptoms compatible with COVID-19 are persisting or worsening, the symptomatic individual is to continue to stay home from school/work. A repeat COVID-19 test should be considered, even if they previously tested negative.

If a health care provider has told a student or staff person that the symptom(s) are related to a non-infectious, chronic or pre-existing condition (e.g., allergies, post-nasal drip, migraines, asthma) the child can return to school/childcare once they feel well enough, without waiting for symptoms to go away.

If the child is not assessed by a health care provider, **and/or** testing for COVID-19 was declined for any reason when recommended, the child is to self-isolate for ten days from symptom onset; away from household members when possible. If self-isolation away from household members is not possible, the **unvaccinated** caregiver/household member must isolate for 10 days from the last interaction with their child. If symptoms develop in the caregiver/household member, regardless of vaccinated status, the household member is to contact their health care provider and/or go for testing.

Niagara Region Public Health (NRPH) will follow up with all individuals who test positive.

Medical notes or proof of negative tests should not be required for staff or students to return to school

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## **SIBLINGS AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS LIVING WITH A SYMPTOMATIC CHILD**

If a test is required as per the screening tool or recommended by a health care provider for the symptomatic child, all household members who are **not fully vaccinated are to self-isolate**, until the test results are back. If the test result is negative, household members can leave self-isolation.

Household members with no symptoms who are **fully vaccinated** do not have to self-isolate and may attend work/school/childcare.

## **SIBLINGS OF AN ISOLATING COHORT**

If a child in a home is a high risk contact from someone who tested positive, other children in the home can continue to attend school as long as all household members are symptom free.

## **HIGH RISK CONTACTS OF CASES**

High risk contacts of a case are to isolate for **ten days**, unless they are **fully vaccinated** or if they were previously positive within the past ninety days and recovered. Testing at day seven is recommended for all high risk contacts, regardless if they were vaccinated or not. If testing is declined, isolation may be extended as determined by NRPH.

NRPH will determine isolation and return to school dates for vaccinated and unvaccinated high risk contacts and cohorts.

## **MASKS/FACIAL COVERINGS**

Students in kindergarten are **recommended** and students in grades 1 to 12 are **required** to wear properly fitted masks indoors in school, including in hallways and during classes, as well as in school vehicles.

Masks may be temporarily removed indoors to eat or drink, with a minimum distance of two metres maintained at all times. Masks are **recommended** outdoors when physical distancing between others cannot be maintained. Consult your local school board for mask exemption requirements.

**For more school/childcare COVID-19 information go to [www.niagararegion.ca](http://www.niagararegion.ca) or you may contact the Public Health COVID-19 Info-Line at 905-688-8248, press 7.**

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