

August 18, 2020

A Letter to Parents of School-Aged Children/Youth about Considerations for Returning to School for September 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As you consider the decision to send your child/youth to school, it is important to reflect on the following.

- Many children/youth will benefit from being in school in-person. It's good for their education, good for their wellbeing, and good for their growth and development. It can also provide some stability for the whole family.

AND

- The Ministry of Education has developed Guidelines for School Re-Opening which include the basic public health measures which have helped us decrease the risk for, and respond effectively to, COVID-19.

AND

- The COVID-19 virus can be transmitted among people who are in close contact with each other. A recent review suggests the risk of transmission of the virus is low in school settings that have precautions in place.¹

AND

- All school boards have been working with public health units to design their school reopening plans and operational guidelines for staff to follow. These plans will feature public health measures and provide a confirmation of practices that address infection prevention and control in schools. This includes screening of students and staff to allow for people who are ill to stay home, using masks, distancing practices, adapting schedules and student flow, and maintaining vigilance with hand hygiene, as well as responding rapidly to exclude close contacts when someone is confirmed to have a COVID-19 infection. The experience with Day Care centres over the past three months shows that using specific public health measures have been effective.

As the new school year approaches, you need to balance various options and make a decision that makes sense for your family. As everyone's situation is different, the decision to send your child/youth to school in-person needs to be one that works for you and your family. Whatever your decision is, there will be an adjustment for your child/youth. Coping may be easier for some and harder for others. Our Website has many resources to support the mental health and well-being of your child/youth. Talking with your child/youth about their concerns and helping them develop coping strategies are essential. Here are some [resources](#) within the Leeds, Grenville, Lanark region to help support mental health and well-being, and [resources](#) within the Eastern Ontario Health Unit region.

First, think about the child/youth that you will send to school.

For most children and youth, the benefits of being in school will outweigh the risks to them. Children infected with COVID usually have a very mild illness and recover well.² Talk to your child's health care

¹ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/children-and-school-settings-covid-19-transmission>

² <https://www.sickkids.ca/PDFs/About-SickKids/81407-COVID19-Recommendations-for-School-Reopening-SickKids.pdf>

provider about any conditions that might put them at greater risk for severe disease, if they were to get COVID-19.

Second, think about the people who live with your child/youth.

Most adults will recover without help if they get COVID-19. The people at risk for severe outcomes are those who are over the age of 70, or have chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease or cancer. These people may need extra protection if you are living together in the same household.

Third, public health nurses will be working with staff in each school to support them to put preventive measures in place, and respond to any student or staff that becomes infected with COVID-19.

Your school is committed to creating a safe and caring learning environment, and public health will be working closely with schools and school boards to identify and manage people who develop COVID-19 infection. We have been in close communication with school boards since schools closed in March.

The local public health unit has taken time and care to establish a universal procedure in all schools. If an employee, or student in the school, presents with at least one symptom reflective of COVID-19, the individual will be isolated at the school site and arrangements will be made immediately for the person to leave the school building. Enhanced cleaning will then be completed in the area where the person was directed to self-isolate. This situation will be communicated to public health for follow up and guidance on testing, cleaning, and management of any contacts of the individual.

If a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit will provide specific advice on what control measures need to be put in place to prevent the potential spread and how to monitor for other possible infected staff or students. Close contacts will be required to stay home for 14 days from the last date of exposure and be tested. Schools can still support the student's learning while at home. All parents with a child in the class will be notified and asked to monitor their child for symptoms.

Fourth, as a community we can keep the risk low for all those in schools.

Preventing COVID-19 infection in the broader community is key to keeping schools safer. It is very important for everyone to continue to be COVID SMART.

S – [Self-isolate](#) if you have [symptoms of COVID-19](#). [Consider getting tested](#).

M – Wear a [mask/cloth face covering](#) when in enclosed public spaces and when physical distancing is a challenge outdoors.

A – Avoid touching your face.

R – Remain 2 metres/6 feet apart from people you do not live with and people not in your [social circle](#).

T – Take time for [regular hand hygiene](#) and respiratory etiquette.

There is no right or wrong decision about whether your child/youth attends school in person or virtually - only what is right for your child/youth and your family right now.

To contact your local health unit: Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit (contact@healthunit.org); Eastern Ontario Health Unit (info@eohu.ca)

Sincerely,

Original signed by:
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