



August 5, 2022

## **Ministry of Education direction to school boards regarding health and safety measures in schools for the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.**

This information was provided to TECT by Provincial OECTA.

Below please find the most recent Ministry of Education direction to school boards regarding health and safety measures in schools for the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.

*“On the advice of the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, for the 2022-23 school year, most health and safety requirements remain unchanged from the previous direction provided to school board partners at the end of the 2021-22 school year.”*

Specifically:

### Masking

- Masks will not be required for students, staff and visitors in schools, school board offices, or on student transportation.
- School boards and schools are strongly encouraged to actively promote respectful, welcoming and inclusive environments for individuals who choose to wear, or not to wear a mask.
- The government will continue to provide free masks for students and staff and eye protection for staff, if they choose to use them. School boards can order this optional PPE for students and staff through the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery.
- Where staff are required to perform an Aerosol Generating Medical Procedure (AGMP) or required to be in the same room when an AGMP is being performed, N95 respirators (fit tested) are recommended and will continue to be provided.
- All staff will continue to have access to non-fit-tested N95s.

### Rapid Antigen Tests

- School boards will continue to have access to rapid antigen tests to be used in accordance with provincial testing guidance.

### Students With Disabilities

- All health and safety protections continue to be fully adhered to with additional supports in staffing and mental health funding to support students most in need.

### Mental Health Support

- All students will continue to have access to evidence-based and timely school-based mental health services and supports.

### Self-Screening

- It is recommended that staff, students and visitors continue to self-screen every day before attending school using either the COVID-19 school and childcare screening tool or a screening tool designated by the local public health unit. See: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>
- Following public health guidance, individuals should stay home if they are feeling ill to prevent the spread of illness.

### Hand Hygiene

- Appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette should continue to be promoted and integrated throughout the school day.
- Hand sanitizer will continue to be provided to school boards through the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and the government's pandemic supply chain.

### Student Transportation

- Schools and school vehicles are expected to continue with enhanced cleaning protocols requiring cleaning/disinfecting high-touch surfaces at least once daily.
- Required critical supplies and equipment, for example, disinfectant, will continue to be provided to school boards through the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery.

### Ventilation

- School boards are expected to continue to implement ventilation best practice measures outlined in [2021:B14 School Ventilation \(attached\) as applicable in the context of each school facility](#).
- Consistent with updated American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) guidance, ventilation systems should be operated two hours or more before the first occupant enters the building or after the last occupant leaves the building.
- HEPA units are required in every occupied kindergarten class, in all occupied learning spaces without mechanical ventilation, and in mechanically ventilated learning spaces without MERV-13 level filters. Any additional HEPA filter units should continue to be deployed by school boards in learning spaces in a manner that maximizes their benefit.
- For the 2022-23 school year, school boards must also continue to publicly communicate ventilation measures through the Standardized Ventilation Measures Report. School boards should ensure this report can be easily found on their website.
- Reports must be updated and posted publicly by August 26, 2022.

### Absenteeism

- Schools and school boards are to continue to monitor their own absence rates and collaborate closely with their local public health unit, including School-Focused Nurses, to support student well-being and health and safety in schools.
- Should the absence rate in a school increase above what a school would typically experience, and absences are not linked to other factors (e.g., holidays), it is recommended that the school principal notify their local public health unit.
- Local public health units are encouraged to have a process in place to review absence data and may provide schools/boards with additional guidance and support, including suggested resources for communication to students, staff and families.

### Fire Drills and Emergency Response Plans

- For the 2022-23 school year, the Ministry is working with the Office of the Fire Marshal on a return to pre-pandemic total evacuation fire drill procedures in schools. Information from the Office of the Fire Marshal about fire drill procedures in schools will be shared at a later date.
- Any updates to a school's Emergency and Crisis Response plan should be aligned with the most current public health guidance and should be fully communicated to members of the school community, the local police service and the local fire department.

### COVID-19 School Board Lead

- Each school board is to identify a COVID-19 contact person (COVID-19 Board Lead) and to provide their name and contact information to the Field Services Branch regional manager by September 9, 2022.
- The purpose of identifying COVID-19 Board Leads is to facilitate the Ministry's ongoing and timely communications with school boards in order to support the implementation of any health and safety measures necessary to keep schools open for in-person learning.