

February 20, 2021

Update on COVID-19 school/childcare screening and isolation requirements

The COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC) are here in Ontario, and urgent effort by all is needed to slow their spread and protect our healthcare system and our most vulnerable. In efforts to reduce the potential spread of the VOC, the Ministry of Health has recently implemented enhanced public health measures.

Two enhanced measures that affect schools and childcare are changes to daily school/childcare screening and isolation of household contacts of symptomatic individuals.

Changes to Daily Screening

Students, staff, and children must screen for COVID-19 every day before going to school/childcare. The provincial screening tool has been updated as follows:

- Individuals with any new or worsening symptom of COVID-19, **even those with only one symptom**, must stay home, **without exemption***, 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.

The updated provincial school/childcare screening tool can be found at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>

Isolation Requirements for Household Contacts of Symptomatic Individuals

New provincial guidelines take a more aggressive approach to managing cases and contacts in order to reduce the potential spread of VOCs. Household contacts are at increased risk of exposure based on sharing a household with a symptomatic and/or self-isolating individual. Therefore, added measures are in place even for those who are asymptomatic (someone who does not have any symptoms).

Asymptomatic household contacts of symptomatic individuals must ISOLATE (do not leave home), even for essential reasons

- All asymptomatic household contacts of symptomatic individuals are required to isolate, **without exemption***, **even for essential reasons**, until the symptomatic individual receives a negative COVID-19 test result, or an alternative diagnosis by a health care professional.
- If the symptomatic individual does not seek COVID-19 testing, HPPH will treat the individual as a probable case and all household contacts must isolate for 14 days from their last contact with that symptomatic individual.

- Example: A parent has a child in their household who has a new or worsening symptom of COVID-19 (e.g., a fever or runny nose). Both the parent and child must stay home and cannot attend school or work until the symptomatic child receives a negative COVID-19 test result or alternative diagnosis. If the child tests positive or is not tested, the child should isolate, including from other household members, for 10 days from symptom onset and then return to school if they are feeling better. The parent, as a close contact of a probable case, should quarantine for 14 days from their last contact with the child.
- If a student, child or staff person becomes symptomatic while at school/childcare, the individual will be sent home and must isolate. All household members should also return home, and isolate immediately.

Asymptomatic household contacts of asymptomatic individuals who are high-risk contacts: STAY AT HOME, except for essential reasons

- If an asymptomatic individual is directed to self-isolate as a high-risk contact of a positive COVID-19 case, their asymptomatic household members should stay home for 14 days except for essential reasons. In this case, attending school, child care or work is allowable for the household contacts as an **essential activity**, as long as everyone in the household remains asymptomatic. Other essential reasons to leave the home include essential errands such as grocery shopping or picking up a prescription, or attending a medical appointment.
- Example: An asymptomatic parent has a child in their household who has been directed to self-isolate because they were in a classroom with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 (i.e., the child is a high-risk contact). As long as the parent and child are both asymptomatic, **and the child is able to isolate away from other household members**, the parent can continue to go to work, but should not leave home for other non-essential reasons for 14 days. The child, as a high risk contact, should isolate as directed, and not attend school.
 - If the asymptomatic individual does not isolate away from other household members, any household member who is in contact with the asymptomatic individual will also need to isolate and will not be able to leave home for essential reasons. If the asymptomatic individual is unable to isolate alone (e.g. young child), HPPH suggests that one caregiver is chosen to isolate with the individual for the duration of the isolation.

***Please note that an individual can leave isolation to get a COVID-19 test or for urgent medical care.**

We recognize that these changes may create challenges, and appreciate your understanding and continued support in keeping our community safe. Huron Perth Public Health strongly believes that schools and childcare are safe places for our children, and essential for their wellbeing. We will continue to work with the school boards and childcare settings to ensure all the necessary steps are taken to prevent the spread of the virus, and protect our schools and childcare settings.

Huron Perth Public Health reminds all residents to continue following all public health measures:

- limit close contacts to your own household
- frequent hand hygiene
- physical distancing
- stay home when sick
- get tested if you have symptoms
- wear a mask/face covering (well-fitted, 3-layer)
- avoid non-essential outings and travel

Fewer cases in our community will mean fewer cases in our schools. Thank you for your patience, understanding and support.

For information, visit:

- www.hpph.ca/coronavirus
- www.ontario.ca/coronavirus
- Follow us
at www.facebook.com/HuronPerthPublicHealth and www.twitter.com/HPPublicHealth
- Call HPPH at 1-888-221-2133