



August 27, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The 2021-2022 academic year has arrived, and the COVID-19 School Support Team (CSST) at Ottawa Public Health (OPH), in collaboration with school boards, is preparing for the return in-person learning for the school community. Below are frequently asked questions and key messages to ensure a safe and smooth transition back to school. For more information on how CSST is supporting Ottawa schools this school year, and our most up to date resources, visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/SchoolsCOVID19](https://OttawaPublicHealth.ca/SchoolsCOVID19).

## COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

COVID-19 vaccinations are available for staff and students born in 2009 or earlier. Every individual who receives their COVID-19 vaccination helps bring Ottawa one step closer to [community immunity](#). [Book your vaccine appointment](#) as soon as you are eligible.

Being fully vaccinated\* will help protect your children, youth and their school community. If your child is fully vaccinated and is exposed to someone who tests positive for COVID-19, they do not need to stay home and self-isolate as long as they do not have symptoms.

If your child received one or more doses of a COVID-19 vaccine [outside of the Province of Ontario](#) (e.g., Quebec or outside of Canada), proof of immunization should be provided to OPH to verify vaccination status in the case that he or she is in contact with an individual who tests positive for COVID-19. Please complete this [form](#) to notify OPH of your out of province dose administration, and upload the documentation you have received. Questions? Visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/FAQVaccine](https://OttawaPublicHealth.ca/FAQVaccine).

**\*Fully vaccinated** means that it has been at least 14 days since receiving:

1. The second dose of an accepted two-dose COVID-19 vaccine or a combination of accepted vaccines (i.e. Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD); **OR**
2. The only dose of the single-dose COVID-19 vaccine series of Janssen (Johnson & Johnson); **OR**
3. A complete COVID-19 vaccine series that is listed for emergency use by the [World Health Organization](#).

### If my child is vaccinated, do they need to continue following public health measures?

The COVID-19 vaccine reduces your child's chances of becoming seriously ill, being hospitalized and dying from COVID-19. While experts learn more about the protection that COVID-19 vaccines provide under real-life conditions, it is important for everyone to continue practicing [public health measures](#) to help stop the spread of COVID-19. This includes wearing a mask, physical distancing, and screening daily for COVID-19 symptoms.

## SCREENING TOOL

All students should complete the screening tool daily prior to attending school, regardless of their vaccination status. To help stop the spread of COVID-19 in the school community, all students who have COVID-19 symptoms should isolate, get tested, and follow the guidance provided in the screening tool.

Visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/SchoolsCOVID19](https://OttawaPublicHealth.ca/SchoolsCOVID19) for the most recent school, high-school, and adult screening tools.

## SYMPTOMS & TESTING

### What should I do if my child develops symptoms at HOME?

If your child develops symptoms of COVID-19 at home, even if they are fully vaccinated, please get your child tested immediately, keep them at home on self-isolation, and notify their school.

Your child may return to school once one of the following conditions have been met AND symptoms have improved for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication (or resolved for 48 hours for nausea, vomiting, diarrhea):

- Receive a negative COVID-19 PCR test result;
- Complete a minimum of 10 days of isolation since the date symptoms began; or
- Receive an alternative diagnosis by a health care provider.

### What should I do if my child develops symptoms at SCHOOL?

If your child develops symptoms of COVID-19 at school, even if they are fully vaccinated, school staff will follow OPH guidelines to isolate your child. School staff will arrange for a parent/guardian to immediately pick up your child and any unvaccinated siblings in school or childcare. Your child will need to follow the directions provided above.

### Do household members need to self-isolate if my child is symptomatic?

All household members who are not fully vaccinated must stay home and self-isolate while your child is awaiting test results. Household members (including siblings) that are fully vaccinated and do not have any COVID-19 symptoms do not need to isolate while waiting for your child's test results.

If your symptomatic child is not tested for COVID-19, please contact OPH to speak to a Public Health Nurse for further directions by phone 613-580-6744.

### Does my child need to have a medical note or proof of a negative COVID-19 test result before returning to school?

Once the above conditions are met, a medical note is not required for your child to return to school; some schools may use the '[Attestation for return to school letter](#).'

*For more information contact Ottawa Public Health at 613-580-6744 or refer to the [COVID-19 Assessment Centre and Care Clinics](#) webpage.*

## LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH & PROVINCIAL GUIDELINES

### Will school go back to 'normal operations' with higher rates of COVID-19 vaccination in the community?

OPH will continue to follow the lead of provincial government which sets the operational guidance for schools. The government will monitor the COVID-19 situation, including risks related to variants of concern (VOCs), and will work with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and local public health units (PHUs) to assess key measures to inform and update provincial guidance and direction, including lifting measures when appropriate.

*For more information, please visit [COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools \(2021-2022\)](#).*

### **Will my child be required to wear masks in the school setting?**

Wearing a mask will help to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus by protecting yourself and others. For return to school, students grade 1-12 are required to wear non-medical or cloth face masks indoors, regardless of their vaccination status. At this time, it is strongly recommended that all Kindergarten students wear a face mask when indoors. Masking is recommended for all staff and students while outdoors if physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Visit [Kids and Masks: Tips from an Expert](#) to help prepare your child to wear a mask at school.

## **COVID-19 & HIGH-RISK CONTACTS**

**What happens when a staff or student tests positive for COVID-19 at my child's school?** When OPH is notified that a staff or student associated with a school tests positive for COVID-19, the priority is to ensure that the individual is at home and not at school. If the individual was at school while they were contagious, a CSST Public Health Nurse will work closely with the school principal to complete a thorough assessment and identify high-risk contacts.

For more information, please visit [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/HighRiskContact/](https://OttawaPublicHealth.ca/HighRiskContact/)

### **How will I be notified if my child is identified as a high-risk contact when an individual tests positive for COVID-19?**

All individuals who have been identified as high-risk contacts will be notified through automated messages via phone call, text message, or email. Therefore, it is important to make sure your contact information is up to date in the school's records. The automated message will be sent on the initial notification date and throughout the isolation period. The message will include important directions for your child and household members, including self-isolation, testing information, and instructions if your child becomes symptomatic. OPH will verify the vaccination status of all high-risk contacts and will send an automated message with different instructions for individuals who are fully vaccinated.

### **What if my child is vaccinated and identified as a high-risk contact?**

If a child is fully vaccinated at the time of their high-risk exposure to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 AND does **NOT** have COVID-19 symptoms, they do **NOT** need to stay home and self-isolate (*with exceptions*). This means that they and their household members can still attend school and go out in the community. They will still be advised to receive a COVID-19 test 7 days after the last date of exposure because while the vaccine provides excellent protection there is still risk of testing positive for COVID-19.

*If the child develops symptoms, they should be tested immediately, stay home and self-isolate, and contact OPH for further direction.*

### **What if my child is not vaccinated and identified as a high-risk contact?**

If a child is not fully vaccinated at the time of their high-risk exposure to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, they are required to isolate for 10 days from the last date of exposure, as determined by OPH. They will be advised to be tested 7 days after the last date of exposure. Household members that are not fully vaccinated should only leave the house for essential reasons (e.g. school, work, groceries).

*If the child develops symptoms during their isolation period, they should seek testing immediately at a COVID-19 clinic and contact OPH for further direction.*

## MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

OPH recognizes the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the mental health and well-being of students and their families. It is normal to feel stressed and it is okay not to be okay. Here are resources and services to help you and your children cope with these challenging times. You are not alone.

In partnership with the Royal Mental Health Care Centre, OPH developed the [Protecting Your Mental Health](#) series to help protect you and your children's mental health during COVID-19. For more information, please check out:

- [How to help you and your children cope](#) (Factsheet)
- [Helping your children through COVID](#) (Video)
- [Mental Health Supports for Parents](#) (Video)

The [Pandemic Parenting Playbook](#) developed by Ontario Child and Youth Mental Health in partnership with Parents Lifeline of Eastern Ontario, provides practical tips to support children and youth's mental health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [Mental Health Multilingual Videos](#) provide information on protecting your mental health, including suggestions for parents. These videos are available in English, French, Arabic, Somali, and Mandarin.

The [Mental Health and Substance Services and Resources](#) support you and your children when you have mental health concerns. For example:

- [Crossroads Children's Mental Health Centre](#) provides mental health services for children under 12 years of age in English only.
- [PLEO](#) is a family peer support program for parents of children living with mental health challenges to help you access resources and services specifically designed for your family needs.
- [Access MHA](#) provides a single point of entry to eastern Ontario's system of care for mental health and addictions for ages 16 years and older.
- [Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services](#) provides addiction services in English only for youth and adults.
- [1Call1Click](#) helps children, youth (from birth to age 21 years old) and their families connect to mental health and addiction services
- [Counselling Connect](#) provides access to phone or video counselling sessions for residents of all ages living in the Ottawa area.

For parenting information and to stay connected, please visit [Parenting in Ottawa](#) and [FaceBook](#) page.

If you have any questions or would like to speak to a Public Health Nurse, please phone 613-580-6744 and follow the prompts to the OPH COVID-19 line or by email [healthsante@ottawa.ca](mailto:healthsante@ottawa.ca).

Sincerely,

Ottawa Public Health

*Do you have more questions on COVID-19 and school? Find specific answers at [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/SchoolsCOVID19](https://OttawaPublicHealth.ca/SchoolsCOVID19).*

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*Disclaimer: The information provided in this OPH document is up-to-date as of August 27, 2021.*