

HALTON REGION PUBLIC HEALTH • Office of the Medical Officer of Health

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TO: Halton Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Emergency Departments

FROM: Dr. Deepika Lobo, Associate Medical Officer of Health

DATE: September 14, 2020

RE: COVID-19 updates – Back to School

- There is ongoing community spread of COVID-19 in Halton Region
- **At this time, COVID-19 must be considered as a potential diagnosis for anyone presenting with symptoms of acute respiratory infection, regardless of their travel or contact history.**
- COVID-19 can cause a very mild, cold-like illness that is indistinguishable clinically from other respiratory tract infections.
- Children tend to have milder infection than adults. Evidence to date suggests that approximately 1-10 percent of COVID-19 cases are in children, with a substantial portion being asymptomatic.

Healthcare Professional's (HCP) Role in Recommending Testing for COVID-19:

- HCP are likely to be consulted to determine if a symptomatic child/adult needs to be tested for COVID-19. This determination is based on the provider's clinical judgment and there are no validated clinical tools to differentiate COVID-19 from other illnesses with similar symptoms.
- Public Health recommends that HCP have a low threshold for recommending testing for patients with [symptoms](#) consistent with COVID-19.
- Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms and no known alternative diagnosis for their symptoms should undergo testing, as the return of a symptomatic case of COVID-19 to a school or workplace will put other students and staff at high risk.
 - **NOTE:** the diagnosis of another infection such as acute otitis media, streptococcal pharyngitis or influenza does not exclude the possibility of co-infection with COVID-19.
- **Symptomatic individuals (and their household close contacts) awaiting test results must self-isolate and not attend work or school until they receive a negative test.**
 - This is also required as part of the [Section 22 class order](#) in Halton Region
- Asymptomatic persons, who are identified as high-risk contacts (e.g., children in the same class as a confirmed case) are advised to go for testing no earlier than 5 days after initial close contact with the case, as testing during the incubation period is often negative. Current estimates of COVID-19 incubation period range from 1-14 days with median estimates of 5-7 days between infection and the onset of clinical symptoms of the disease.
- High-risk contacts are required to continue to [self-isolate](#) for 14 days despite a negative test and re-testing is advised if there are new or worsening symptoms.

- More information about testing can be found [online](#) and the [Quick Reference Public Health Guidance on Testing and Clearance](#)

Daily self-assessment screen:

- Children and staff attending school are required to undergo a daily screening [self-assessment](#) questionnaire that asks about symptoms of COVID-19 and follow the directions provided.
- HCP with access to a patient’s medical history, can play an important role in helping individuals determine answers to the following screening questions about underlying causes of specific symptoms:
 - Whether a cough is a “new or worsening cough (more than usual)”
 - Whether sore throat and/or runny nose and/or stuffy/congested nose are “related to seasonal allergies or other known causes/conditions”.
 - Whether digestive issues like nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain are “related to other known causes or conditions”.

Return to school protocol

While a student or staff is waiting for COVID-19 test results, they must remain in self-isolation and cannot attend school in-person.

Negative COVID-19 Results	Not tested for COVID-19	Positive COVID-19 Results
<p>If student/staff is symptom free for 24 hours* and can pass the COVID-19 screening tool, they can return to school.</p> <p>Documented proof of the negative test result is not required to return to school.</p> <p>*Mild symptoms known to persist in young children (e.g., runny nose) may be ongoing at time of return to school if other symptoms have been resolved and there’s a negative test</p>	<p>Student/staff and household members must remain home for 14 days from the onset of symptoms AND resolved for 24 hours before returning to school.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Has been assessed by a primary care provider that symptoms are not due to COVID-19 AND testing was not recommended AND symptoms are resolved for 24 hours.</p>	<p>Student/staff to self-isolate for 14 days from symptom onset, or for 14 days from date of testing (if no symptoms). Public Health will contact all positive cases and will instruct when it is safe to return to school.</p>

Requests for Medical Notes:

Medical notes or proof of negative tests are generally not required for staff or students to return to school following an illness. However, some schools may require a medical note as per each school’s policy.

Resources for Physicians

Halton Region Public Health Information on COVID-19 for Physicians and Health Care Professionals: www.halton.ca/physicians

Please report all suspected/confirmed cases of [Diseases of Public Health Significance](#) to Public Health immediately by calling 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866.

PLEASE POST IN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS AND PHYSICIAN LOUNGES – IF YOU CAN’T ACCESS HYPERLINKS OR DIDN’T RECEIVE IN FULL, PLEASE EMAIL DOCTORS@HALTON.CA FOR ELECTRONIC COPY.

