

Keeping Schools Safe During COVID-19 Webinar FAQs for Parents and Caregivers October 26, 2020

Q1. My child only has a cold. Do they really need to have a test?

Not every symptom or situation requires testing and isolation. Parents/students are strongly encouraged to complete [COVID-19 screening tool](#) daily before going to school and follow the guidance on whether or not it is advised to go to school.

Refer to this resource: [My Child Did Not Pass the COVID-19 Daily Screening. Now What?](#)

Q2. How do I get a COVID-19 test for my child?

If you are advised by a healthcare professional to seek testing:

PRHC COVID-19 Assessment Centre

- If you have COVID-19 symptoms and need to be assessed by a doctor, contact PRHC's COVID-19 Assessment Centre directly by phone at 705-876-5086 to determine whether an appointment is required. This phone line is staffed from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. seven days a week.
- Anyone with severe symptoms should go to the Emergency Department or call 911

Community COVID-19 Testing Centre

- For the most up to date information on testing locations and to make an appointment visit Peterborough Public Health's [testing webpage](#).

Q3. My child was sent home with symptoms and now they are fine. Is testing needed?

Not every symptom or situation requires testing and isolation. Parents/students are strongly encouraged to complete [COVID-19 screening tool](#) daily before going to school and follow the guidance on whether or not it is advised to go to school.

The answer is, IT DEPENDS. The newest version of the online assessment tool divides the symptoms into two groups. The first set are the ones that are more commonly associated with COVID. Just one symptom of fever, cough, breathing difficulties or a loss of taste or smell would be enough to warrant testing.

However, with the second group of symptoms, like sore throat and runny nose, if your child has only **ONE** new or worsening symptom, it is safe to keep them **home for 24 hours** to be monitored to see whether the symptom gets better or worse.

- If within 24 hours your child starts to feel better and **symptom is improving**, they can return to school and/or child care when well enough to do so. COVID-19 testing is not needed.

- **BUT**, if the symptom is getting worse, or they develop a second symptom your child should isolate and **contact the COVID-19 assessment centre for testing** and/or seek medical advice, if required.

Refer to this resource: [My Child Did Not Pass the COVID-19 Daily Screening. Now What?](#)

Q4. My child has symptoms. Does the rest of the family need to be tested/self-isolate? Can siblings go back to school? Can parents go to work?

All household members of the symptomatic child are to **self-monitor** for 14 days. They can continue to go to child care, school or work as long as they have not developed symptoms themselves, and as long as the ill child has not been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Note: There is a difference between [self-isolating](#) and [self-monitoring](#).

- When an individual is told to **self-isolate**, they are to remain at home and not leave for the duration advised by public health. As much as possible, it means staying in a separate room away from other people in your home and using a separate bathroom if you have one.
- When an individual is **self-monitoring**, they are to pay close attention to how they are feeling and whether they start to develop any symptoms. They can still continue to go to work or attend school.

Refer to this resource: [How to Self-Isolate](#)

Refer to this resource: [How to Self-Monitor](#)

Refer to this resource: [Self-isolation: Guide for caregivers, household members and close contacts](#)

Q5. My child received a negative test result, when can they go back to school?

If your child was **tested for COVID-19** they are required to self-isolate until test results are available.

If the test **results are negative**, your child may return to school or child care if all three of the following criteria are true:

1. They do not have a fever (without taking medication)

AND

2. It has been at least 24 hours since symptoms started improving

AND

3. They have not been in close physical contact with a person who currently has COVID-19.

Refer to this resource: [My Child Did Not Pass the COVID-19 Daily Screening. Now What?](#)

Q6. Why are students outside without masks on?

Students in Grades 4 to 12 are required to wear non-medical or cloth masks indoors in school, including in hallways and during classes. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged but not required to wear masks in indoor spaces. Outdoor times like recess and physical education can be used as opportunities to provide students with breaks from wearing masks within their cohorts as long as a physical distancing can be maintained.

Q7. What is considered an outbreak in a school?

Public health is responsible for determining if an outbreak exists, declaring an outbreak, and providing direction on outbreak control measures to be implemented. We will assist in determining which cohort(s) should be sent

home, or if a partial, or full, school closure is required. We'll also determine when an outbreak can be declared over.

An outbreak in a school is defined as two or more lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases in students and/or staff (or other visitors) in a school with an epidemiological link, within a 14-day period, where at least one case could have reasonably acquired their infection* in the school (including transportation and before/after school care).

*Examples of reasonably having acquired infection in school include:

- No obvious source of infection outside of the school setting; OR
- Known exposure in the school setting

If an outbreak is declared in a school, it DOES NOT mean that the school is automatically closed. When an outbreak is declared, there is an opportunity to put in place additional measures to protect students and staff (i.e., no visitors, staff must not go to other schools). When at least 14 days have passed with no evidence of ongoing transmission; AND no further ill individuals associated with the initial exposed cohorts with tests pending, we can declare it OVER.

Q8. With a positive case, why did PPH only call students in their cohort when these students had close contacts with others not in their cohort?

PPH performs a risk assessment of contacts/ cohorts of a positive case and will advise all contacts of need for self-isolation or self-monitoring.

What is a close contact? 'Close contact' means being less than 2 metres away in the same room, workspace, or area for more than 15 minutes with a confirmed case of COVID-19, starting from 48 hours before the person began having symptoms or 48 hours before the test day for people who did not have symptoms.

Refer to this resource: [Close Contact...or Not](#)

Q9. I heard about the case at X school, what do I need to do? Does my child need to get tested/stay home?

A Public Health Nurse will contact you if your child is considered a close contact and direct you on next steps. **This will occur in the first 24-48 hours of a new case. (7 days a week)**

If you do NOT get a call, then your child can continue to go to school and does not need a test as long as they do not show any symptoms. Make sure the school has your most up-to-date contact information and screen your child every day prior to arrival.

Q10. There has been a positive case in my workplace, can I still send my kids to school?

PPH performs a risk assessment of positive cases and will advise all close contacts on next steps including if they need to self-isolate or seek testing. If you have not been contacted, then household contacts can continue to go to school and work.

Make sure to complete the [daily self screen](#) and monitor for symptoms!

Q 11. “Will the PPHU please issue new guidelines for KPRDSB, above what is recommended by the Ministry and consistent with what has been implemented in Toronto, to keep Peterborough students, teachers, and other school workers safe?” &

Q12. “Will you consider the other side of the coin in this issue [masking] and assess these potential harmful risks to our children before making them mandatory and repeal the mandatory requirement in favor of other measures like more distancing in classrooms while sitting at the desks?”

Public health receives guidance provincially and implements measures based on local context. Evidence gathered from weekly provincial school outbreak meetings have demonstrated that active screening and same day testing are the most important interventions currently. If our weekly incidence rates in Peterborough continues to rise, we would address the identified risks first, e.g. if cases are linked to a particular setting or behaviour (i.e., schools) then additional measures may be considered. It is important to note that evidence is always emerging and public health measures are constantly evolving.

Questions during the live session:

Q13. Why are students wearing masks while exercising in their cohort whether they are physically distanced or not? This may compromise breathing issue (pre COVID). Further to this student are on lunch without masks indoors where they may be at greater risk.

Students in Grades 4 to 12 are required to wear non-medical or cloth masks indoors in school, including in hallways and during classes. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged but not required to wear masks in indoor spaces. Outdoor times like recess and physical education can be used as opportunities to provide students with breaks from wearing masks within their cohorts as long as a physical distancing can be maintained. Exceptions should be made for students with medical conditions or special needs that prevent masking.

Q14. Has there been any discussion about maximum class numbers for elementary schools? For example, currently 27 students in a grade 8 class with up to 5 teaching adults in the class each day. Could this number increase even higher following the transfers of students back and forth to the virtual school?

Public health measures in the classroom include recommendations that students be physical distanced within the classroom, proper hand washing, enhanced cleaning of high touch surfaces, and the use of masks. Schools are also required to keep detailed records of attendance, cohort lists and seating charts, transportation lists and updated contact information for all students, staff and visitors to the school which will be used by public health for contact management in the event of a positive case. In terms of class sizes and transitions between in person and virtual learning should be directed to your local school board as it is a Ministry of Education mandate.