

BACK-TO-SCHOOL UPDATE FROM YORK REGION PUBLIC HEALTH

August 30, 2022

Dear families:

We hope you had a safe and enjoyable summer.

Throughout the school year, York Region Public Health (YRPH) provides parents and guardians up-to-date information and resources like this letter to help create a healthy school environment and keep children, families and communities safe. YRPH looks forward to continuing to support you for the 2022/2023 school year.

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COVID-19: WHERE ARE WE NOW AND WHAT ARE WE EXPECTING?

Well over two years into the pandemic, we are all ready to return to normal life. We know the pandemic has been hard for children and has had impacts on their education and their mental health.

Unfortunately, the pandemic is not yet over. This summer we experienced a seventh wave which impacted millions of Ontarians and continues to strain our health system. It is difficult to predict the future of this pandemic, but we are expecting another wave of COVID-19 in the late fall.

With the lifting of pandemic measures from previous years, like mandatory masking and capacity limits, we expect to see other common seasonal viruses we were used to seeing before the pandemic. Distancing and masking were effective for COVID-19 but were also effective against other respiratory viruses. These viruses are generally mild in children and most adults. However, when transmitted quickly and to many people at the same time, they can present a challenge to individuals, families and to the health system.

The advice below on screening, testing, masking, immunizations, hand washing and covering your coughs/sneezes will help prevent illness from COVID-19 and other viruses. **Ultimately, these measures will help keep you, your child and the school community healthy and in school.**

SYMPTOMS, SCREENING, TESTING AND RETURNING TO SCHOOL

- Complete the [school and child care screening tool](#) daily

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675
TTY 1-866-512-6228
york.ca/COVID19

The logo for York Region, featuring a stylized white bird or wing shape above the text "York Region" in a white serif font, all set against a dark blue background with a light blue wave-like shape behind it.

York Region

- Stay home if you have any symptoms, whether they are gastrointestinal (vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain) or respiratory, and even if you test negative for COVID-19
- Rapid antigen tests continue to be [available for free](#) at pharmacies and grocery stores and may be used to test for COVID-19 infection in people with symptoms
 - As a reminder, a single negative rapid antigen test in a person with symptoms does not mean they do not have COVID-19
 - It is recommended people with COVID-19 symptoms complete two tests, 24 to 48 hours apart, if their first test is negative

MASKING

- Although masks are not mandatory for students, staff and visitors in schools, child care settings and on buses, individuals should wear a mask in public settings, like schools, if they are [close contacts](#) of someone with COVID-19 or recovering from a COVID-19 infection
- Masks work to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses and many students, staff and visitors may still choose to wear a mask to protect themselves or others from illness
- Additional measures like masking may be encouraged or recommended again if a new variant emerges or if the levels of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses show a concerning increase, especially in the winter months

IMMUNIZATIONS

COVID-19 vaccines

- COVID-19 vaccines are available at [YRPH clinics](#), [provincial vaccination clinics](#) and some [local pharmacies](#)
- We encourage everyone to get a COVID-19 vaccine as part of your safe back-to-school plan
- Vaccines are approved and available to all children six months of age and older
- Booster doses are available to more eligible age groups and populations
- Visit york.ca/COVID19Vaccine for more information and to book an appointment

Grade 7 vaccines (Hepatitis B, Human Papillomavirus and Meningococcal)

- YRPH will resume [in-school clinics](#) for Hepatitis B, Human Papillomavirus and Meningococcal in late September to help students catch-up on missed vaccinations during the pandemic; more information about the resumption of these clinics will be shared in the fall
- YRPH continues to offer these vaccinations through [community-based clinics](#) for students in Grade 7 and up
- You do not need to wait for a school-based clinic; consider booking an appointment for your child sooner
- If these immunizations were previously completed in school or through your health care provider, additional doses are not required

Other routine childhood vaccinations (chickenpox, tetanus/diphtheria/polio, etc.)

- Routine childhood immunizations remain an important tool in supporting the health and safety of children and the community, and are required under the *Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA)*. Since March 2020, YRPH has not enforced the ISPA, but it is important to keep up to date and share immunization records with us
- Contact your health care provider to catch up on any vaccines you and your children may have missed

- Remember to update your child's immunization record with YRPH after they receive any vaccine

Visit york.ca/immunizations to book an appointment at a community clinic for any Grade 7 vaccine or to update immunization records for routine vaccines. You can also call YRPH at 1-877-464-9675, ext. 73456 to provide an update.

CLEAN HANDS AND COVERING YOUR COUGHS/SNEEZES

Proper handwashing with soap and water (or using hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available) is an important part of keeping ourselves and our schools healthy. Coughing and sneezing with a mask on, into a tissue or your sleeve helps keep hands clean and prevents the spread of germs. Always wash your hands often and well.

HELPFUL YORK.CA LINKS

Visit york.ca/SafeAtSchool for more information and resources on COVID-19. For additional infection prevention and control information and resources, visit york.ca/InfectionPrevention or call Access York at 1-877-464-9675, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

We would like to remind everyone to show kindness and consideration to others. This fall presents another opportunity for families to lead by example and show respect for each other's personal decisions and comfort levels.

Wishing you a safe and healthy school year.

Sincerely,

York Region Public Health

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON COVID-19 VACCINES

- [COVID-19 Vaccinations in York Region](#)
- York Region Public Health – [Questions and Answers for Caregivers of Children Six Months to Under Five Years of Age](#)
- Ministry of Health – [Fact Sheet for Children and Youth Five Years of Age and Older](#)
- [Max the Vax – COVID-19 Vaccine Information for Children and Caregivers](#)
- [Parents, have you done your homework?](#) Top questions about COVID-19 vaccines for kids
- [SickKids COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service](#) - Speak directly to a health care provider about the COVID-19 Vaccine

RESOURCES

- [Current travel requirements and exemptions](#) - Government of Canada
- [School and Child Care Screening Tool](#) – Government of Ontario
- York Region Public Health:
 - [Hooray for Handwashing](#)
 - [How to correctly use hand sanitizer](#)
 - [Masks protect you and me](#)
 - [Cover your cough or sneeze | French](#)
 - [Information for Parents to Help Prevent the Spread of Illness](#)
- York Region Public Health – Video: [Handwashing for kids](#)