

September 9, 2020

Toronto Board of Health Members

**Re: Update on Toronto Public Health's COVID-19 School Protocol**

Dear colleagues,

Re-opening schools is a significant test of how we handle the next stage of the COVID-19 pandemic – and so it is crucial that we do everything we can to get it right.

Over the summer, our team at Toronto Public Health has been hard at work providing advice and guidance to the Government of Ontario and the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board on enhanced measures for safe school reopening. These measures include recommendations on ensuring adequate space for physical distancing of 6 feet (or 2 metres) among students; facial coverings for all students where possible; prioritizing resources and supports for schools in high-needs areas; exploring new testing options for homes and schools, including piloting saliva-based testing; and encouraging a flexible start date – many of which have been adopted by the TDSB and TCDSB.

As we head into the school year, I want to provide you with an update on protocols that Toronto Public Health has developed to manage and respond to cases of COVID-19 within in the school system. These protocols are in addition to the team of over 70 public health nurses who are providing on-the-ground support to schools, as well as advice, training, and education to staff and families.

Our team at Toronto Public Health has been working closely with the TDSB and TCDSB, along with our provincial partners, to ensure that schools are as safe as possible during these uncertain times. The City's webpage [COVID-19: School Information for Parents & Caregivers](#) has resources and information for parents, including how to prepare for school, how the cohort system will work, and which face coverings should be used.

Toronto Public Health has developed a detailed protocol for what will occur if a child or staff member at a school tests positive for COVID-19, which includes the following:

- All parents with children attending the school will be notified by Toronto Public Health if there is a positive case in the school. The identity of the person who tested positive for COVID-19 will not be shared as this is personal health information.
- Toronto Public Health will lead the case and contact tracing. This includes working with the school to find out who the child or staff member had contact with while they may have been contagious.
- Depending on the timeline of the case, all students in the same class cohort will need to self-isolate for a period of 14 days at home.

- Toronto Public Health will advise students who have been asked to self-isolate when they can return to school.
- Other students in the school should monitor for symptoms, but if they are not a close contact of the case, they do not need to self-isolate or stay home unless directed to by Toronto Public Health.

Toronto Public Health is responsible for declaring an outbreak, which occurs when there are two or more positive cases in a school, within a 14-day period, with at least one infection traced back to the school environment. It is important to note that an outbreak does not, in and of itself, trigger a school to close. Direction during an outbreak will be provided by Toronto Public Health, and may include measures such as transportation to and from school or before and after school care.

These are uncertain times, and preparation is key. While we cannot anticipate every outcome, we can ensure that there are procedures and processes in place that will mitigate transmission and help to keep people safe.

Since January, we have relied on our Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eileen de Villa, and our team at Toronto Public Health, to lead us through these challenges. As we embark on another phase in our ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am confident that with their expert advice and guidance we will continue to make progress in the fight against COVID-19 in our city.

I look forward to meeting on September 21 and discussing these matters in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Joe

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Cressy', with a long, sweeping underline.

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