

# School and Childcare Frequently Asked Questions



## **My child has symptoms of COVID-19 or tests positive on a rapid test. What do I do?**

Use the [Ontario school and childcare screen](#) to assess your child's symptoms and follow all instructions. If the screen says to isolate for 5 or 10 days, and/or your child tests positive on a rapid test, visit [www.ontario.ca/exposed](http://www.ontario.ca/exposed) for information on what to do next. Depending on results of the screen, household members may need to isolate for the same amount of time as the person who is symptomatic or tested positive. If 5 or 10 day isolation is required, it is the parent/guardian's responsibility to notify your child's close contacts and complete the required isolation time, even if symptoms improve. Inform your child's school or childcare of the absence. You are not required to report results of positive rapid tests to the health unit or the school/childcare centre.

## **Who is considered a close contact?**

A close contact is anyone you were less than two metres away from for at least 15 minutes, or multiple shorter lengths of time, without masking in the 48 hours before symptoms began or a positive test result, whichever came first. Informing your contacts will help stop the spread of the virus. Give them the link to this webpage, [www.ontario.ca/exposed](http://www.ontario.ca/exposed), so they can protect themselves and their contacts. Your close contacts should follow the [advice for being exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19](#).

Classmates in school who were following all protocols such as distancing and masking are generally not considered close contacts. Children might have friends from class that they spend time with outside of school who may be close contacts.

## **How will I know if my child is a contact of someone with symptoms of COVID-19 or has tested positive?**

In most cases, the person who is symptomatic or positive for COVID-19 is responsible to notify you. NWHU continues to contact people who are connected to cases in high-risk settings such as long-term care homes. Schools are not considered high-risk settings.

## **What happens if there is a case in my child's school?**

Principals are responsible to report to NWHU if there is a sharp increase in absences (approximately 30%) due to illness. Upon receiving a report, NWHU will send a letter to families to notify them if higher levels of illness occur. Generally, schools will remain open to staff and students who pass the daily screen. If there are staffing shortages due to illness, schools may need to close classrooms or schools until staffing can be arranged.



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## How can my child prevent getting COVID-19?

Getting vaccinated is our best defense against COVID-19. In addition to vaccination, your school/childcare centre has put measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As with all infectious diseases, students should: wash hands regularly, stay 2 metres from others (whenever possible), stay home when feeling unwell, practise cough/sneeze etiquette, and follow any other instructions required by the school/childcare centre such as use of masks indoors. Role modelling preventive measures in your personal life will help reinforce these practices for your child.

## Why is the process for school cases changing with the Omicron variant?

The Omicron variant is more transmissible and transmits faster. The health care system does not have resources to test or trace contacts of everyone who is sick due to the high number of cases. Contact tracing is also less effective when a virus transmits so quickly. To reduce hospitalizations and deaths, it is necessary to focus efforts on high-risk settings. Schools have not been a high-risk setting for transmission of COVID-19 and most cases of the Omicron variant in children tend to be a milder illness or do not require hospitalization. Some groups still have a higher risk for more severe illness, including people who are unvaccinated, older, or immunocompromised. Public health is focusing contact tracing efforts on high-risk settings like long-term care homes and people who work in health care settings. This process is similar to how public health responds to other infectious diseases. Please continue to do all you can to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

## Why are schools going back to in-person when there are cases?

Currently, the benefits of in-person learning far outweigh the risks at a population level. It has been shown that in-person learning can positively impact our students' health and well-being. Emerging evidence suggests Ontarians aged 5-19 years appear to be at low risk for hospitalization and severe disease from Omicron, compared to other ages and compared to the Delta variant. Hospitalization risk is further reduced by vaccination.



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