

# IF COVID-19 IS DETECTED IN A SCHOOL, WHAT DOES PUBLIC HEALTH DO?

Students from kindergarten to grade 12 are returning to classrooms for conventional full day and modified/adaptive school. Public Health has a collaborative history of working with the Public and Catholic school boards in York Region related to communicable and infectious diseases. Previous examples have included norovirus outbreaks, chickenpox reporting and investigation, pertussis (whooping cough) contact tracing, measles investigations and immunization clinics.

We have established reporting practices with schools to quickly identify when schools are experiencing fluctuations in attendance. We also have established practices for reporting of illnesses. Principals have a mandate under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* to report to Public Health if they suspect a student may have a communicable disease.

If you or your child is ill with [COVID-19 symptoms](#) or you are concerned that you or your child has been exposed to a case of COVID-19, we encourage you to get tested at a [COVID-19 Assessment Centre](#). If your child is ill, they must stay home from school.

On August 26, 2020, Ontario's Ministry of Health released the [COVID-19 Guidance: School Outbreak Management](#) guidelines. Below are the steps York Region Public Health (YRPH) will undertake in the event of a case of COVID-19 in a school setting in the Region.

## If there is a case of COVID-19 in a school setting

1. YRPH will be notified of a positive case that attended school while infectious. YRPH may be notified by the lab, a health care provider, school principal, parent/guardian or a health unit from another jurisdiction
2. YRPH will verify if the case attended school while infectious and conduct an in-depth case investigation to identify contacts of the case  
In the school setting, contacts are likely to be:
  - Students and teacher(s) in the same cohort
  - Any school staff that interacted with the case's cohort while the case was infectious
  - Siblings of the case in different gradesOther contacts would also be investigated, such as household contacts, or any other place the case may have visited while infectious
3. YRPH will post relevant information on the [york.ca/covid19data](#) dashboard. The [York Region District School Board](#) and [York Region Catholic School Board](#) will also post information on their websites.
4. YRPH will also collect the following information during the investigation:
  - Did the case ride the bus?
  - Did the case attend before and/or after school care at the school?
  - What personal protective equipment (PPE) or masks were worn by the case, students, and staff while the case was infectious?



- Where did the case acquire the infection? Any known sources outside of the school?
  - What is the overall absenteeism at the school?
5. If there are two or more lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases in students and/or staff (or other visitors) in a school with an epidemiological link\*, YRPH will declare the school in outbreak
  6. YRPH, including our infection prevention and control staff, will work directly with the school board and Principal to outline all actions needed to manage the case or potential outbreak in the school
  7. YRPH will directly notify potential contacts of the case to advise on testing, self-isolation and/or self-monitoring. This may be in the form of a phone call or a letter to those potentially exposed
  8. YRPH will communicate daily with the school principal and school staff to monitor for any new symptomatic staff or students and advise on any additional testing and self-isolation required
  9. YRPH will advise when students and staff are safe to return to school
  10. YRPH will advise on all infection and prevention and control measures needed such as cleaning and disinfection
  11. YRPH will aid with communication to parents to ensure timely and accurate messaging
  12. YRPH will monitor the school daily until there are no new cases of COVID-19 for 14 days after the last case. When there are no new cases of COVID-19 for more than 14 days, the outbreak will be declared over

York Region Public Health is committed to transparency and working together with schools, school boards, students and parents. In the event of a case or outbreak of COVID-19, YRPH will work alongside our community partners to ensure frequent communication is provided to anyone impacted, while maintaining the privacy of those involved.

## **School absentee reports**

During the school year, absences in each school due to illness are received daily by the school boards (Public and Catholic). These absences are monitored when a school reports elevated levels of illness. These reports help Public Health understand each school's normal level of absences due to illness, guides decisions on how to respond and supports schools when higher levels of illness are reported.

If your child is ill and staying home from school, be sure to report the illness to your child's school. This helps collect the absence due to illness data that is reported to public health.

For example, school absence due to illness information has been used to monitor illness levels in elementary schools during influenza season as an indicator for when influenza is starting to circulate in our community.

We are exploring adding options to the school's reporting system to better detect COVID-19 related illness. This will help proactively identify COVID-19 activity in schools before a confirmed COVID-19 case is reported to public health or the school.

## **For more information**

For more information on COVID-19 in York Region, visit [york.ca/covid19](https://york.ca/covid19) or call **1-877-464-9675**.

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\* Outbreak definition: 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.