

Schools/Childcare and COVID-19 Requirements: Frequently Asked Questions

Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) has received many questions about the enhanced public health measures added in February 2021. The Ontario Ministry of Health added these enhanced measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC), and they apply to everyone in Ontario. The changes are not specific to only schools/childcare or only Huron Perth.

Two of the enhanced measures – changes to daily school/childcare screening and isolation requirements – are important for those who attend or work at a school or childcare facility. We hope that the following answers to the most common questions will be helpful.

COVID-19 school and childcare screening

1. **What are the changes to daily screening?**
2. **What do I do if my child fails the COVID-19 school and childcare screening?**

Household isolation

3. **When do we need to isolate?**
4. **Does everyone in our home have to stay home if one person is sick?**
5. **Why do all household members have to stay home when one person is sick?**

Self-isolation and children

6. **What does it mean for someone to isolate on their own?**
7. **My child is too young to isolate alone. What can I do?**
8. **Our home is too small for family members to isolate from each other. What can I do?**
9. **Have children always needed to isolate?**

Sick at school/childcare

10. **My child has allergies and frequently gets a stuffy nose. Do I have to isolate my child AND the household every time this happens?**
11. **What happens if my child gets sick at school/childcare?**
12. **What happens if someone in my child's class gets COVID?**

More Information

13. **Are these requirements only for children?**
14. **Who came up with these requirements?**
15. **These are very difficult requirements for my family and me.**
16. **Who can I contact for more information?**

COVID-19 school and childcare screening

1. What are the changes to daily screening?

Everyone should be self-monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19, and staying home when ill. Since schools and childcare reopened last year, all children who attend school or childcare are required to screen for COVID-19 every day using the [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#). The requirement to screen has not changed, but the screening questions have been adjusted.

Previously, students may have passed the screen if they had only one symptom of COVID-19. Now, students will receive a 'failed' screen with any new or worsening symptom of COVID-19, ***even those with only one symptom***. This matches the screening requirements for the general public, where one symptom of COVID-19 means you don't pass the screen, and should stay home.

Please note that it has always been public health guidance to stay home when ill. The single-symptom screen reflects a more rigorous approach to stopping the potential spread of COVID-19.

2. What do I do if my child fails the COVID-19 school and childcare screening?

Please follow the instructions given on the screening. For further guidance, please see our [COVID-19 Decision Tool](#) for parents/guardians.

Household isolation

3. When do we need to isolate?

Everyone in your household must stay home if anyone has COVID-19 symptoms or is waiting for test results. This applies to everyone, not just school-aged children.

4. Does everyone in our home have to stay home if one person is sick?

Yes. Everyone in your household must stay home if anyone has COVID-19 symptoms or is waiting for test results.

Household members must stay home until;

- the person with symptoms gets a negative COVID-19 test result,
- or is cleared by public health,
- or is diagnosed with another illness.

5. Why do all household members have to stay home when one person is sick?

The new guidance is to address the COVID-19 variants of concern (VOCs). VOCs pass more quickly from person to person, and have the potential to spread rapidly. Household contacts are at increased risk of exposure based on sharing a household with a symptomatic and/or self-isolating individual, and the potential risk of spread is greater. These enhanced measures are in place to reduce the potential spread of VOCs.

Self-isolation and children

6. What does it mean for someone to isolate on their own?

Generally, self-isolation means separating the individual from others, including those within your home, with the purpose of stopping the spread of the virus. Please see Public Health Ontario's [Self Isolation: Guide for caregivers, household members and close contacts](#).

We know that it may be difficult to keep a small child in self-isolation. When a child is instructed to isolate, we ask you make every effort to isolate your child within the home to the best of your ability:

- Making sure your child sleeps in a separate room.
- Making sure your child is kept at least 6 feet from others when in shared spaces.
- Wearing masks, both child and family members, if able.
- Not sharing bathrooms if possible.
- Increasing cleaning of high touch areas.
- Not having any visitors into the home.

7. My child is too young to isolate alone. What can I do?

If you are unable to make reasonable efforts to isolate the child consistently, you may choose one caregiver to isolate with the child for the duration of the isolation. If the child or caregiver develop symptoms or become a case, the isolation period might have to be extended.

8. Our home is too small for family members to isolate from each other. What can I do?

If this is your situation, we ask that you contact HPPH for further guidance.

9. Have children always needed to isolate?

Yes. Any individual (including children) experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, or identified as a high-risk contact have always been required to isolate. What is new from the previous guidance is that now household contacts must isolate if someone in their house is identified as a high-risk contact, or is waiting for a COVID-19 test result. How isolation is carried out is not new; it has been in place since early 2020. However, the new isolation requirements has resulted in more people needing to isolate.

Sick at school/childcare

10. My child has allergies and frequently gets a stuffy nose. Do I have to isolate my child AND the household every time this happens?

The Provincial Screening asks if the child is experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms that are **new**, **worsening**, and **not related to other known causes** or conditions they already have.

So if the symptoms are related to another known cause (e.g. stuffy nose due to seasonal allergies), or if the symptoms are "normal" for the child (e.g. tummy ache), the child should stay

home until they are feeling better, but household members would not need to isolate/stay home.

11. What happens if my child gets sick at school/childcare?

If a child becomes ill at school/childcare with any [COVID-19 symptoms](#):

- The school/childcare centre will isolate the child (and their siblings) from others to prevent potential spread of illness.
- You will be called to pick up your child. At that time, you will be given a letter that identifies what symptom(s) they are experiencing and what to do next.
- All household members of the ill child must also return home, including siblings.
- When you return home, complete the Provincial Screening Tool and follow its advice.
- It is the responsibility of the parent to complete the screening and **follow the directions**.

12. What happens if someone in my child's class gets COVID?

When there is a case associated with a school or childcare centre, HPPH works closely with the school/childcare to prevent any potential spread. HPPH and the school/childcare work together to identify who may have been in contact with the confirmed case during their infectious period. If your child is determined to be a high-risk contact, they will receive a letter from HPPH with information on what to do.

The current guidance for high-risk contacts is that they must **self-isolate**, and all **household members must stay home**, except for essential reasons. You will receive a phone call from public health with further guidance on isolation dates and testing.

We understand that news of a potential COVID-19 case in childcare or school may be upsetting and cause worry or stress, but it is important to remember to be kind. Know that while the risk of getting COVID-19 is never zero, there are many measures in place in schools and in the community to decrease the spread of the virus. We need to remain kind to others who are making the best decisions they can based on their circumstances and needs.

[More Information](#)

13. Are these requirements only for children?

No. The enhanced public health measures, including the updated isolation requirements, apply to everyone, not just children. Realizing the impact that these changes would have on families of school-age children in particular, HPPH wanted to ensure parents knew about the changes.

14. Who came up with these requirements?

The Government of Ontario sets the requirements as part of the provincial COVID-19 response framework. The Ministry of Health provides guidance on how to manage COVID-19 to all public health units; therefore, these changes are not specific to Huron Perth. The enhanced measures are based on the Ministry of Health's response to the VOCs, and reducing the spread of COVID-19.

15. These are very difficult requirements for my family and me.

We acknowledge that this is not easy for families, as many staff at HPPH also have school-aged children. We appreciate the patience of families during this time as we all try to keep cases low so that schools can remain open. As we learn more about vaccine effectiveness against VOCs, and as our vaccination efforts continue, we are hopeful that this guidance will change.

16. Who can I contact for more information?

- General COVID-19 information: www.hpph.ca/coronavirus
- Information about self-isolating: www.hpph.ca/coronavirus → "Self Isolation Information"
- Information about testing: www.hpph.ca/coronavirus → "Testing, Tracing and Receiving Results"
- Email HPPH's COVID Intake team at: COVIDIntake@hpph.ca
- Call HPPH at 1-888-221-2133