



NEWS

Health units unlikely to access extra targeted testing supplies

Asymptomatic testing of school staff and students not necessary at this point: health officials

By [Catherine Whitnall](#) Kawartha Lakes This Week

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With thousands of more students returning to schools across the GTA, the province is expanding access to targeted asymptomatic testing, but health officials say it's unlikely such efforts will be necessary here.

Targeted asymptomatic testing has helped identify cases early, informed public health action, and has been used to manage outbreaks. To support the expansion of targeted asymptomatic testing, the Ministry of Education has procured test

collection capacity for up to 50,000 tests per week, to be deployed at the discretion of local public health units in collaboration with schools.

“Peterborough Public Health continues to work closely with our district school board/education partners to support a safe return to school for all students and staff,” stated Peterborough Public Health communications officer Brittany Cadence.

“With COVID-19 cases in schools to date, we have worked closely with test partners to have testing done in a timely manner to support our contact tracing.”

Cadence added that, if a situation arose where additional testing is deemed necessary, such as asymptomatic testing in a school community because of an outbreak or a high incidence rate in a school community, the health unit will access available testing products.

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The Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit has also discussed testing of symptomatic staff and students with its school boards, but based on the number of cases in area schools, the health unit is not implementing any testing programs of asymptomatic staff or students at this time.

“Asymptomatic school staff can contact area assessment centres for testing, and there are some area pharmacies that also provide testing for asymptomatic individuals. The situation is always being monitored closely, and if the numbers warranted, the health unit may re-evaluate as needed,” said Pam Stuckless, director of health promotion

While the health unit cannot speak to individual cases, Stuckless said 11.4 per cent of all cases reported in the health unit’s area between Jan. 17 and Feb. 1 were school-aged children, but this does not mean they were reported in a school setting; roughly 9,000 area students are learning virtually.

“Based on ministry protocol, these cases were still reported as “school cases” even if

these individuals were not in school during their period of communicability,” explained Stuckless.

“As the schools were closed when some of these individuals tested positive, there were no high-risk contacts associated with the school.”

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