



NEWS

## Province's plan misses perfect opportunity to vaccinate all education workers

Trillium Lakelands union presidents concerned about schools remaining safe amid COVID-19 variants

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

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Vaccinating the Kawartha Lakes education workers who provide support to students with special needs during the April spring break is a good “step forward,” but only one piece of the pandemic puzzle, according to two union presidents.

“When (the province) talks about the ‘most vulnerable,’ there’s a group that’s getting

left out of the discussion, and that's people who can't self-isolate because of their jobs – and that's our in-school teachers," said Colin Matthew, Trillium Lakelands Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation president. "Our members are at risk because they have to be."

The province announced Wednesday, April 7 that vaccinations of education workers who provide direct support to students with special needs will begin during the April break. All education workers in priority neighbourhoods in Toronto and Peel will be eligible for vaccinations, followed by other hot spot regions, such as York, Ottawa, Hamilton, Halton and Durham. Further rollout across the province will be dictated by supply.

With the province earmarking doses for older adults – roughly one million individuals 65 and older have not registered for their shot – this could mean waiting several weeks.

It's the latter that concerns Karen Bratina, Trillium Lakelands Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario president, who said given how quickly COVID-19 variants are spreading, time is a crucial factor.

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"Teachers are fearful, they're uncertain ... and dealing with this government has been so frustrating," said Bratina, who plans to continue to advocate for vaccinations for all in-school education workers, including secretaries, custodians and even school bus drivers. "This is the only way that (the province) can guarantee that schools stay open."

While the local boards and communities have been fortunate to have relatively few COVID-19 cases compared to the Greater Toronto Area, Bratina said that shouldn't be a deciding factor.

"Low cases doesn't make us immune to this virus. All it takes is one case to shut down a school," said Bratina, noting, after months of seeing zeros on the page, there

are now five elementary schools – including Grandview and Woodville – reporting positive COVID cases, resulting in the closure of five classrooms.

How quickly things can escalate is currently being demonstrated by St. Mary Catholic Elementary School in Cobourg. The Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit identified two positive cases on April 2 and, the next day, declared the school in outbreak. The Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington District School Board closed the school on April 4; there were 19 active cases on April 8.

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