

“We are a group of physicians who are deeply concerned about the use of provincial school closures to control the spread of COVID-19. Children and youth have experienced significant harms since March 2020 due to prolonged school closures and we now must prioritize the needs of children and youth.” states the letter.

The letter is signed by more than 500 Ontario doctors including Dr. Karolyn Hardy-Brown and Dr. Allison Lainey from Peterborough and Dr. Kristen Ralph and Dr. Jessica Robinson from Lindsay.

The doctors say the government should be keeping schools open regardless of COVID case counts while recommending a “test-to-stay” strategy whereby children and youth, their siblings, and teachers remain in the classroom following a close-contact exposure, with frequent rapid antigen testing, as recommended by the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. (CDC)

“Two Utah-based “test-to-stay” programs implemented over a four-month period saved over 100,000 in-person instruction days for nearly 60,000 students.” stated the doctors.

The group says children and youth have experienced significant increases in hospital mental health admissions for eating disorders and psychiatric illness (55% and 30% respectively), emergency mental health visits (25%), and urgent care mental health visits (20%). Newly diagnosed eating disorders in youth have risen from 24.5 to 40.6 cases per month, with hospitalizations increasing from 7.5 to 20.0 per month. vi • School closures have worsened food security and have resulted in increased screen time with less physical activity and higher rates of childhood obesity.

Parents and kids found themselves in the same predicament last January with Ontario’s largest pediatric hospitals saying children need to be back learning in classrooms as soon as possible. A school guidance document, led by Toronto’s Hospital for Sick Children and released in January 2021, said delays to in-person learning “must be