

of Education, was joined by Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health to announce the launch of school-based vaccine clinics for youth and staff, along with a significant deployment of rapid antigen tests. These new measures build on the province providing millions of high-quality masks for staff and students and thousands more HEPA filtration units.

"We are meeting the unique challenges presented by the Omicron variant head-on as we do everything we can to support in-person learning," said Minister Lecce. "Our government is taking nothing for granted, which is why we are launching school-based vaccination clinics, distributing millions of rapid antigen tests and have deployed non-fit-tested N95 masks to staff and three-ply masks to students."

Vaccination is the province's best defence against the highly transmissible Omicron variant. Current vaccination rates among children aged 12 to 17 years old are encouraging with more than 82 per cent having received two doses. Of children aged five to 11 years old, nearly 50 percent have received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, but more can be done to encourage and support vaccination, which is why Ontario will launch school-based vaccine clinics when students return to in-person learning. To further encourage voluntary vaccination for children aged 5 to 11, the government has asked school boards to work with local Public Health Units (PHUs) to add school-day vaccination clinics for students (i.e. during instructional hours). School boards are also expected to work with local PHUs and share documents and other information with families, such as resources available at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccines-children-and-youth>.

In the coming days, parents will receive a form offering the opportunity to safely and conveniently provide public health units the authority to vaccinate their child at a school-based vaccine clinic.

To help stabilize workforce and student participation, beginning the week of January 17, the Ontario government will also provide rapid