

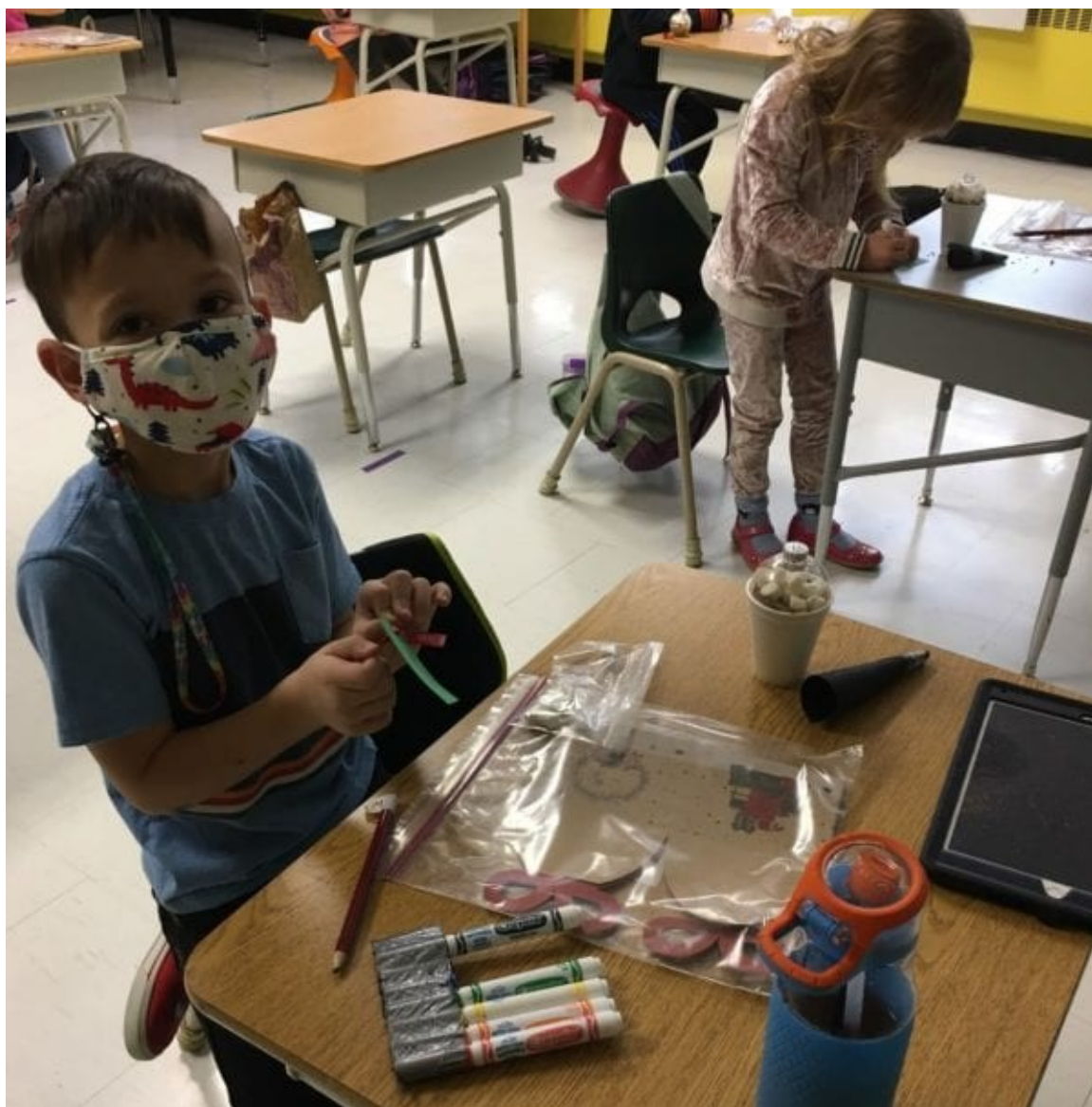
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News

Ministry Of Education Launches School Based Vaccine Clinics, Provides Rapid Antigen Tests



By **Pamela Vanmeer** January 12, 2022



Courtesy Trillium Lakelands District School Board

KAWARTHA LAKES-With elementary and high school students returning to in-person learning on January 17, Stephen Lecce, Minister

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

antigen tests for students and staff in public elementary and secondary schools, along with children and staff in child care settings. Over 3.9 million rapid antigen tests are being shipped to school boards this week, with additional tests to be delivered next week. The use of the tests is for symptomatic individuals, who will be required to take two rapid tests 24 hours apart, and upon negative results can return to class.

Additional measures in place to prepare for the return to in-person learning include the following:

- **High-Quality Masks:** Providing access to more than 10 million non-fit-tested N95 masks to all education and child care staff – the only province to do so – with more than four million three-ply cloth masks for students recently shipped for use in schools.
- **Improved Ventilation:** Deploying an additional 3,000 standalone HEPA filter units to learning environments, building on the ventilation improvement measures already in place at every school across Ontario, including the more than 70,000 HEPA filter units and other ventilation devices that have been provided and mechanical ventilation upgrades.
- **Stricter Screening:** Updated and stricter screening requirements for students and staff, including daily onsite confirmation of screening.
- **Historic Funding:** School board access to \$1.6 billion in resources to protect against COVID-19, including supports for mental health, technology, over 2,350 additional staff and ventilation.
- **Access to Additional Educators:** Access to retired educators for a longer period of time following a recent agreement with the Ontario Teachers’ Federation, and access to first year teacher candidates who are deemed eligible.
- **Enhanced Cohorting and Cleaning:** New time-limited cohorting protocols to limit direct and indirect contacts by pausing high-contact extra curricular sports, stricter lunch cohort requirements, and elevated cleaning requirements at all schools.

The government is further expanding access to vaccines by:

- Supporting a mass vaccination clinic at the International Centre with dedicated times for education and child care staff
- Opening 10 vaccination clinics across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area that offer dedicated time slots for education and child care staff
- Encouraging public health units to support accelerated access to boosters.

More than five million Ontarians have already received a booster shot and the above vaccination options are in addition to those also being offered locally by public health units across the province.

Remote learning will remain an option for those families wishing to access it.

“In-person learning is critical to the mental health and well-being of our children and youth,” said Dr. Moore. “In light of the unique challenges posed by the Omicron variant, my team and I will continue to work with the education sector to review all of our guidelines and all environmental, health, cleaning, and ventilation standards to ensure our schools remain as safe as possible for all.”