

# School board sending COVID testing kits home for the holidays - Lindsay Advocate

By Kirk Winter



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The Trillium Lakelands District School Board will be sending COVID-19 rapid screening kits home with all their elementary students the week of Dec. 6 as one of the many measures both the board and the province are implementing to ensure a safe return to school after the Christmas holidays.

“All students will be provided a rapid screening kit with five tests for use over the holidays,” director of education Wes Hahn told trustees at the November 23 board meeting. “The use of the tests will be voluntary and does not replace the PCR testing, but it provides a good warning that the virus may be present.”

TLDSB, the province and the district boards of health are gearing up to have a plan put in place that will prevent the significant spike in COVID cases that occurred in Ontario schools after last year's Christmas break. He asked those considering travel again to remember that they may have to factor extended quarantine times upon their return to Canada that could unduly impact their children's education.

“Thirty per cent of all new COVID-19 cases in Ontario are now being found in elementary aged students,” Hahn said. “The majority of new cases in Ontario are in the unvaccinated population.

This increase in rates is not being seen in secondary schools because the vaccination rates have risen. We are very concerned about holiday gatherings so we don't have a repeat of last January (where numbers spiked) that could jeopardize learning in person and extra-curriculars."

Hahn shared with trustees that vaccines for 5-11 year olds have arrived in the area and are being distributed to public health units. Clinics will be offered at schools after hours and on weekends. Hahn said the province hopes for 50% of this age group to get vaccinated as the first of a number of cold weather precautions that the board and province are implementing.

TLDSB will immediately limit the possibility of non-students bringing COVID-19 into school building beginning with virtual conferences with parents rather than the more traditional parent-teacher evenings. Volunteers will continue to be banned from working in schools and all but essential tradespeople will be banned from board sites.

"There will be no assemblies or holiday celebrations (at schools)," Hahn said. "We will be cohorting kids on their breaks after they return from their holiday, trying to balance the need to socialize with safety."

Hahn also told trustees that parents will be asked to again do pre-arrival screening with their children for the two weeks after the holidays, and that staff will once again be doing screening before the children are allowed to enter buildings effective January 3-14.

Trustee Gary Brohman is leery of sending screening kits home with elementary students, some of whom are as young as 4, and wondered if parents could pick them up at the school.

"Kids can't get their mitts and homework home, let alone testing kits," the retired educator opined.

Hahn agreed, and suggested that senior staff would look at other options if necessary.

Trustee John Byrne asked Hahn if he was correct that between two spaced shots and the two weeks for the vaccine to become effective, schools and students really won't be protected till mid-February at the earliest.

Hahn told Byrne that his timeline is correct and it is similar to the one senior staff are working with.

Byrne also wondered why vaccinations are not being done during school hours. Byrne said that once children return home on the school bus many of their caregivers do not have the transportation to get them back to school for after hours clinics.

"School based clinics are just another option for parents to get their children vaccinated and public health will be offering other opportunities for those children to get their shots," Hahn said.