

TRUSTEES PUSH FOR QUICKER COVID-19 TESTING

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There is a critical need for timelier COVID-19 testing in the region in light of revised screening protocols launched on Tuesday by the province, according to the chair of the Halton District School Board.

The new model does not require family members to self-isolate along with a child who is awaiting test results for a potential positive COVID-19 result.

Only once that child has a confirmed case would the parent, sibling or other close contacts need to self-isolate, explained superintendent of education Collette Ruddock in a verbal report to the board on Sept. 16.

"So, whether it is a parent of a student, a sibling of a student, or it's a staff member who has a child who's got symptoms, according to this new provincial screening tool, they are not required to self-isolate," said Ruddock.

The news triggered an immediate re-

sponse from chair Andrea Grebenc, who said it is even more imperative now that testing is timely, because schools need to know as quickly as possible if there is a positive COVID-19 case, so that contact tracing and isolation can occur "to keep COVID at bay and out of our schools as much as possible."

In Halton today, it can take up to 72 hours to get an initial appointment for a COVID-19 test and another four days to get the results, said Grebenc, adding that there are no walk-in testing clinics in the region.

"So you're looking at potentially seven days to get a test result back, and you can imagine the mixing and mingling that can happen, especially now that siblings, children, parents don't have to self-isolate while waiting for a test result," said Grebenc.

Because Halton Region Public Health has now aligned its screening protocols with the province's, and the board has been following local public health guidance throughout the pandemic, the board will adjust its model too, said Ruddock.

With unanimous support from her fellow trustees, Grebenc will be writing a letter to the premier, ministers of education and health, the regional chair and Halton's medical officer of health, imploring them to "dramatically increase the accessibility and capacity for same-day COVID-19 testing and results."

Reopening schools safely matters to everyone

That's why the government of Ontario has worked with health officials, school boards and educators to develop a comprehensive plan to keep kids and staff safe.

- **Physical distancing** measures will be implemented such as desk separation, signs, floor markings and one-way hallways.
- **Face coverings** will be required for staff and students in Grades 4-12.
- **Hand hygiene** will be enabled with hand sanitizer and hand washing.
- **More nurses** will be in schools.
- **School cleaning** will be enhanced.



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