

# RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS NOT CURRENTLY REQUIRED AT HALTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## ASYMPTOMATIC TESTING VALUABLE WHEN COMMUNITY CASE COUNTS ARE AT 100 PER 100,000

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The use of COVID-19 rapid antigen tests is not necessary at this time in Halton District School Board schools.

"Asymptomatic testing is really valuable when case counts in the community are about 100 per 100,000; at this time in Halton we are at 20 to 22 cases per 100,000, so our schools in Halton don't meet the criteria that is presently laid out with respect to the rapid antigen tests," said superintendent of education Terri Blackwell at the

most recent meeting of the HDSB Oct. 6.

At this point, added Blackwell, "rapid antigen tests have really low utility in our schools according to our public health unit. We do have lots of alternatives and effective strategies that have been working well to minimize our transmission."

Like Halton region, other health units do not intend on using the tests unless there are significant criteria met, for example, where there's a school closure and returning students could be tested to ensure there are no leftover cases, said Blackwell.

This news should come as reassurance to parents, said board chair Andrea Grebenc.

"Trustees have been receiving a lot of emails around rapid antigen tests from parents anxious to be

able to contribute to stamping out, getting rid of COVID in the community. Hopefully, this provides some comfort to families that these rapid tests will be used when necessary," said Grebenc.

## TRUSTEES WANT COVID ADDED TO LIST OF DESIGNATED DISEASES

HDSB trustees added their voices to a growing list of school boards requesting that COVID-19 be added to the list of designated diseases in the Immunization of School Pupils Act.

There is no mandatory COVID vaccination program for students at the present time; however, adding COVID-19 to the designated diseases list — which includes tetanus, polio and diphtheria, among others — might inspire



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Low transmission rates and high vaccination rates mean rapid antigen testing is not required in HDSB schools.

more people to get the vaccine to protect those who are unable to do so, wrote Grebenc in a letter to Minister of Health Christine Elliot and Minister of Education Stephen Lecce.

This addition would also provide "a mechanism for exemptions that includes parental education on vaccination," states the letter, which will also be

children. Right now that component is missing, and it allows parents to simply do nothing which enables hesitancy."

If COVID-19 was a designated disease, it would be the duty of parents to ensure that their students fulfil the immunization schedule, added Oakville trustee Joanne Oliver in support.

"That also, I believe, gives the right to public health to then verify that the vaccination has in fact taken place, as we see currently being done with the sharing of records in terms of which students have not been vaccinated against the designated diseases. There's the ability for the medical officer of health, via the school board, to suspend them from the school system, so I think that that's actually a very effective tool."

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