

PROVINCE TO PROVIDE COVID-19 TEST KITS TO STUDENTS

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Ontario will provide take-home COVID-19 tests to students in hopes of limiting an increase in infections when school returns after the Christmas break.

The province will distribute 11 million rapid antigen test kits—five per student—to be used before returning school.

"We know we're heading into a social season where there will be much more interaction at an individual and community level," said Dr. Kieran Moore, Ontario chief medical officer of health. "Knowing the increase in case counts we're seeing, we think it's prudent and reasonable to have those tests in the hands of families to be able to use to further protect them over the

holiday season."

Moore said it is hoped that the tests will provide early detection of cases before students return to the classroom.

Dr. Moore, Minister of Health Christine Elliott and Minister of Education Stephen Lecce held a briefing to talk about the province's plans for making COVID-19 tests more accessible and the potential for vaccinations starting for children aged 5-11.

As of Nov. 18, approval of Pfizer's vaccine for children aged 5-11 by the federal government was pending but expected as early as Nov. 19. Elliott said the province has been working with its 34 public health units to come up with plans to administer the vaccine and some units, such as Toronto, have already unveiled

their plans.

Each health unit will have its own strategy, which could include in-school clinics, mobile clinics and pharmacies to vaccinate children under the age of 12.

"We want to get that first dose in before the holidays and a subsequent second dose eight weeks apart," Dr. Moore said. "That will help us achieve that extra percentage or two of population immunization that is going to be essential to help slow this virus down."

Lecce said high school students will return to regular timetables with four courses per day beginning in the second term.

Elliott also announced expanded testing to allow people experiencing symptoms to get tested in select pharmacies.



Herb Garbutt/YouTube screenshot

Minister of Health Christine Elliott speaks about the province's plan to expand its testing to allow symptomatic people to get tested in pharmacies. Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Kieran Moore (left) and Education Minister Stephen Lecce (right) also spoke about vaccinations for Ontario residents aged 5 to 12.

"This enhanced test strategy will help insure that every Ontarian, regardless of where they live, can access a test closer to home when you need it and get a test result as

quickly as possible," she said.

In response to questions raised about allowing symptomatic people to visit pharmacies, Dr. Moore said, "We have over

a year and a half experience now in providing assessment and testing and we think we can do this in a very safe way."

Pharmacies must opt in to allow symptomatic testing and follow stringent infection and prevention control measures. Some will not be eligible if the physical layout of the pharmacy means measures cannot be met.

He said the safeguards can include separate entrances, a separate facility or space away from the rest of the business.

"Testing is another key step to responding to potential outbreak and surges of COVID-19. As we prepare to head inside over the winter months, enhancing our testing strategy is critical to protecting our hospital capacity and health care resources."

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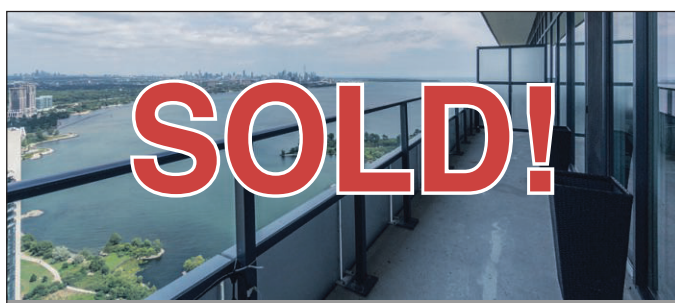
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