

PRESUMPTIVE TESTING FOR STUDENTS, STAFF NOW THE NORM

REVISED PROVINCIAL PROCESS MEANS NO SCHOOL COVID-19 CASE COUNTS

KATHY YANCHUS
kyanchus@metroland.com

If you are sick, stay home.

That's the bottom line for students and staff of the Halton District School Board, as the rapid spread of the Omicron variant wreaks havoc with previous provincial testing protocols.

The sheer volume of cases across the province, and lack of timely access to PCR testing at community assessment centres, has resulted in revised Ministry of Health case and contact management procedures, as outlined to board trustees at the Jan. 5 meeting.

Confirmation of the virus no longer requires PCR testing through an assessment centre; diagnoses are now presumptive based on

the onset of symptoms or a positive test result from a self-administered PCR or Rapid Antigen test (RAT).

If you have one of the following symptoms — fever/chills, cough, shortness of breath or decrease/loss of smell and taste — or two or more of these symptoms — sore throat, extreme fatigue, muscle aches/joint pain, headache, runny nose/nasal congestion or vomiting or diarrhea — you are presumed to have COVID.

Isolation measures have also changed.

"We'll help families navigate this because we've had different changes throughout the past couple of years in terms of what does it mean for someone that has COVID? What are the implications for family members?" said Terri Blackwell, superintendent of education.

Public health messaging requires anyone who is sick to stay home along with their household members, however, isolation pe-

riods have been reduced, said Blackwell.

Those 12 years of age and older who are fully vaccinated or those 11 years old and younger, regardless of vaccination status, must isolate for a minimum of five days from the onset of symptoms, and until symptoms have been improving for 24 hours (or 48 hours for gastrointestinal symptoms), whichever is longer in duration.

Those 12 and older, and either partially vaccinated or unvaccinated, or those who are immune compromised regardless of their age, must isolate for 10 days from the onset of symptoms.

Isolation requirements are not solely for the individual with COVID, but the entire family, said Blackwell.

Those in isolation with access to testing must have two consecutive negative RAT tests (24-48 hours apart) and symptoms must be improving for 24 hours (or 48 for GI symptoms), be-



Graham Paine/Metroland

New guidelines for school boards are in place in the face of unrelenting Omicron cases.

fore the isolation period for the suspected case and household members can end, according to board information.

Similarly, for those isolating, one negative PCR test with symptoms that are improving over 24 hours (or 48 hours for GI symptoms) will allow the suspected case and household members to end their period of isolation.

This also means that the board, as well as the Ministry of Education, will no longer be recording COVID-19 case numbers in schools and "letters that previously came home will not be coming home."

New reporting processes for school boards will be forthcoming from the ministry, according to Blackwell.

"We will be reporting

back when we hear from the ministry in terms of what the new communication looks like because we know that our families want to be informed as do our staff," said Blackwell.

Board staff will also now have access to non-fit-tested N95 masks and students, 3-ply non-medical masks.

The board's inability to confirm and post case numbers is of great concern to parents, said Burlington trustee Andrea Grebenc.

"I lay this right at the feet of the province because they have let us get to this point where we are now flying blind, absolutely blind. We have no accurate case counts out there at all and it is frustrating as a trustee. I feel for the community," said Grebenc.

The province was warned in mid-December by its own science table about the colossal surge in numbers expected with the arrival of the Omicron variant "and ignored it," said Grebenc.

EMERGENCY CHILD CARE AVAILABLE FOR FRONTLINE, HEALTH-CARE WORKERS

MELANIE HENNESSEY
mhennessey@metroland.com

With local schools closed and children learning online, Halton is once again offering emergency child care to health-care

and frontline workers.

The Region has partnered with the Ministry of Education and select child-care operators in Georgetown, Milton, Burlington and Oakville to provide free emergency care, which is fully funded by

the provincial government.

Eligible workers will also have access to licensed home childcare providers in all four municipalities.

Full-day spaces will be available for those eligible with children aged four to

12 who are registered for school in Halton.

"Throughout the pandemic, our health-care and frontline workers have worked around the clock to keep our community safe," said Regional Chair Gary Carr.

"We will continue to ensure our critical workers have the support they need as they respond to COVID-19. Thank you to our children services team, the Province and our local child care providers for working together to pro-

vide this essential service."

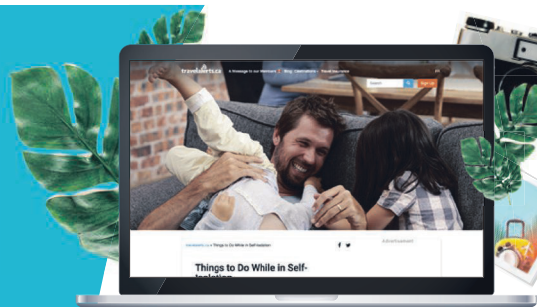
According to Halton Region, spaces are limited, and those who previously applied for targeted emergency child care need to re-apply.

For details on eligibility criteria, approved child care providers and how to apply, visit <https://bit.ly/3G1IjJa> or call 311.

Stay Inside. Stay Informed.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold, we will be making some changes to our website and newsletter. In regards to Canada's federal government advising against all unnecessary travel, we will not be promoting any flights, travel deals and travel packages until further notice.

But, just because our travel deals have been put on hold, our team is dedicated to providing YOU, our amazing subscribers, with inspiring and informative blog content during this time! If you haven't done so yet, please sign up for our weekly newsletter so we can keep you up to date!



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GIDDENS OPTOMETRY



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83 Mill St | 905 873 1867

We are open but due to the current virus situation we are seeing patients by appointment only. If you are planning a visit (for routine eye examinations, eyewear purchase and repair, contact lens pick up etc), please contact us in advance and we will arrange an appointment time for you. This will help to ensure we keep everyone safe!



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Dr. Ben Giddens



Dr. Andrea Kozma



Dr. Stephanie Britton

