



13 August 2021

Public Health Update COVID-19 – Back to School, Vaccination, Public Health Measures to minimize another wave

Dear Chief and Health Director:

As you are aware, COVID-19 Variants of Concern (VOCs) have been circulating in Ontario and the Delta variant (also known as the variant first identified in India) is now the dominant variant of COVID-19 in ON.

Some communities have seen outbreaks of the Delta variant. It has been confirmed that it is even more transmissible than the Alpha variant, and that 2 doses of vaccine provide much more protection than one dose. Although fully vaccinated persons can still get infected with the Delta variant, they are much less likely to need hospital care and become severely ill. Almost all persons now requiring hospitalization with COVID-19 are not vaccinated, or have only received one dose.

As we prepare for back to school, it is becoming even more important that all people 12 and over get their 2 doses, so that we keep community transmission down and protect children younger than 12. By doing this we can support kids in having a normal and healthy school year until they can be vaccinated. Ontario has released its back to school guidance, and emphasized the importance of screening for symptoms and masking as key measures to prevent COVID-19 from spreading in schools. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/covid-19-health-safety-and-operational-guidance-schools-2021-2022>

We are writing to inform you of this evolving information and to emphasize the importance of continuing vaccination efforts. We anticipate that vaccinations for children 5-11 years will happen this fall.

Please continue to follow Public Health Measures

Children have not yet been fully vaccinated – they are still susceptible to COVID-19. Although most children recover easily and quickly from COVID-19, some can have severe disease.

Please continue to advise your residents to practice public health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 **even if they have been vaccinated:**

- PERSONS WITH SYMPTOMS should get tested and stay away from others as much as possible
- Persons waiting for test results should self-isolate until test results are known and they are notified by their health care provider about next steps
- Wear a well-fitting 3-ply mask indoors
- Continue to wash hands often and practice good hygiene
- Cover your cough or sneeze

This advice is intended to supplement, not replace, the advice of your local public health unit.

Communities have had much success in limiting the spread of COVID-19 and preventing illness. Thank you for all of your continuing efforts in promoting vaccinations and public health measures.

Dr. Maurica Maher
Regional Public Health Physician
First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Ontario Region