

November 12, 2021

Dear Parents:

The Ontario Ministry of Education recently announced some new optional testing strategies for students in Ontario elementary, secondary, and private schools:

1. Rapid antigen tests can be used in schools where some classes have been sent home because of one or more students in the school have tested positive for COVID-19. Rapid antigen tests are not to be used on students who have symptoms or have had a high-risk exposure to a person with COVID-19. These tests would be available to students from *other* classes to detect spread into more parts of the school. Because rapid antigen tests are not great at detecting the virus, the test would have to be repeated every 2 days for about 10 days, and there is a risk that some students may test positive on this test who don't actually have COVID-19. This would force them and unvaccinated members of their household to self-isolate until they had a negative test from an assessment centre.
2. For students with symptoms, and students and staff who have had a high-risk contact with someone with COVID-19, the province is providing "take-home" PCR tests. Unvaccinated students or staff who test negative with the take-home kit, will still have to self-isolate. Take-home PCR tests are not as good as PCR tests at an assessment centre because the swab is not inserted to the back of the nose. Also, it could take up to 2 days longer to get the results of take-home tests compared to tests done at the assessment centres.

There is a third option for areas that have a high COVID-19 case rate, but in Nipissing and Parry Sound Districts, our rates are low, so we can't order tests for this option.

During the pandemic, the Health Unit and school boards have worked closely and effectively to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools. School closures are less likely because many students are vaccinated. The more students that get vaccinated, the lower the risk.

In consultation with the local school boards, it has been determined, for now, these testing options for students will not be used. If the COVID-19 situation locally changes, and/or we are seeing significant spread of COVID-19 in schools, we may then decide to move forward with one or both of these testing options.

Sincerely,



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