

## **Infectious Disease Guidance and Prevention in Schools**

Respiratory infectious diseases such as COVID-19, influenza and RSV spread easily through airborne or respiratory droplets. Respiratory transmission rates are trending upwards as of the week ending September 7, 2024. Staff, students and parents with symptoms should follow guidance from their local public health authority. Current public health guidance includes:

- staying home if you are sick to prevent transmission to others
- you should stay home until **all** of the following apply to you:
  - your symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours, or 48 hours if your symptoms include nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
  - you do not have a fever
  - you do not develop any additional symptoms
  - for ten days after your symptoms started, wearing a tight-fitting, well-constructed mask is also encouraged

Please see the poster attached provided by the Middlesex-London Health unit for self-isolation periods for COVID-19 and Flu symptoms.

The Middlesex-London Health Unit and Southwestern Public Health have also created a Guide to Common Childhood Infections (see attached) that includes information and guidance on signs and symptoms, stopping spread, and when to exclude and how to report.

The guide includes a quick reference for exclusion of staff/students for certain diseases and symptoms, such as diarrhea, conjunctivitis (pink eye), strep throat, impetigo, and influenza.

Some childhood diseases are diseases of public health significance and must be reported to the local public health unit, for example, Influenza, Chickenpox, Whooping Cough, and Measles. Under the Ontario Regulation 135/18 and Reg. 569 under the Health Protection and Promotion Act R.S.O 1990 Chapter H.7 - "if a principal of a school or an operator of an institution, such as a day care, has knowledge of, or suspects that a child in their school or day care has a reportable disease, they must monitor and report to the local public health unit." The Reportable Disease Notification Form and reporting timelines are available on the local public health website.

The CCOHS – Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety provides guidance and tip sheets for respiratory infectious diseases that include tips for educational services, such as:

- communicate to all worker, parents, guardians, and visitors that anyone (including children) with symptoms of a respiratory disease (even mild symptoms) should not enter or stay on the premises
- contact parents or guardians to arrange for pick-up as soon as possible after a student or child develops symptoms of a respiratory infectious disease

It is also important to provide clean air in schools through improved ventilation in buildings to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. For example, the Board already uses MERV-13 filters. Guidance also suggests the use of portable HEPA filter units to supplement building ventilation systems, with regular filter changes according to the manufacturers' guidelines.

The use of HEPA units, running continuously, can remove 99.97% of airborne particles (spores, bacteria) to help prevent the spread of respiratory infectious disease (source – CCOHS).

The Board has an Independent Procedure - #9046 – Communicable Disease Procedure – Employees, that states that the Board will take every reasonable precaution to prevent the transmission of communicable and infectious disease. The procedure is to be followed to reduce the spread of infection among staff and students.