

COVID-19 UPDATE

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A Safe Return to In-Person Learning

The official announcement on January 12 that Ontario schools will re-open for in-person learning on January 17, 2022 left many questions un-answered either at the press conference or in the Ministry of Education Memorandum to school boards sent on January 12 at 6:12 pm – two school days before the re-opening of schools to all staff and students. We are continuing to request action on several safety measures that we believe should be implemented immediately to ensure the safety of our members and their students and colleagues.

Case counts and test positivity are as high as they have ever been in Ontario due to the exponential spread of the highly contagious Omicron variant. Hospitalizations and ICU admissions are spiking and will get worse before they get better. We have a healthcare system crisis.

The limited details provided in the government's announcement of a return to in-person learning fail to assuage our concerns that the return to in-person learning and the congregate settings this involves will not exacerbate this current crisis.

OSSTF/FEESO has made it clear that there are many safety measures that still need to be put in place immediately in order to ensure the safety of staff and students. We have done this through joint statement by the education affiliates as well as weekly letters delivered through District Presidents to the local Public Health Units, the School Boards and various Government Ministries. These letters outline in detail the lists of safety measures that need to be in place in all work locations. These safety measures are based on extensive consultation by OSSTF/FEESO with legal and medical experts in the field. We continue to encourage cooperation between the directors of Education and the local health units in order to implement these safety measures.

Below is a list of the most recent recommendations made to school boards and Public Health Units through local leaders for increased safety measures in schools:

- A sufficient quantity of approved N95 masks must be available for all staff
- Training must be provided to use N-95 masks correctly including donning and doffing of masks

- The use of Rapid Antigen testing for students and staff 2-3 times per week for all staff to detect infections and prevent outbreaks
- Deployment of HEPA filtration units for spaces without mechanical ventilation systems operating with MERV 13 filters
- Utilization of larger spaces and/or smaller class sizes to allow for physical distancing between students and staff where necessary
- Establish safety protocols for mask-less periods such as staggered lunch periods, expanding locations in schools, taking measures to reduce density of students eating together.

Most recently, we have also asked local leaders to ask their School Boards questions regarding student masks and reporting of absences.

As we have previously identified, the most critical measure to protect staff and students is ensuring that these populations have access to COVID vaccines and boosters. We want to again underline the importance and urgency of this measure and to urge coordination between School Boards and Public Health Units to ensure the establishment of vaccination clinics for education workers and students.

General Articles/Items of Interest

Note: Media links provided in the list below were accurate as of the date of print/publication. Links are subject to changes as a result of media outlet decisions and are beyond the control of OSSTF/FEESO.

OSSTF/FEESO Information to Members

December 16, 2021 – [Teachers and Education Workers Need Rapid Tests to Slow the Spread of Omicron](#)

December 30, 2021 – [Statement from unions and associations representing Ontario teachers and education workers regarding return to class following 2021-22 winter break](#)

December 31, 2021 – [Joint Letter from Education Unions to Premier Doug Ford](#)

January 3, 2022 – OSSTF/FEESO Statement – [Ford fails to fortify the public school system to protect students and communities](#)

January 11, 2022 – [Ontario's Teacher Unions Demand Schools Reopen Safely](#)

Coverage including OSSTF/FEESO

Note: Subscriptions may be required to access some of the media articles

CBC News

[Ontario schools will reopen for in-person learning on Monday, premier's office says](#)

CP24

[Are Ontario Schools Safe Now?](#)

[OSSTF Responds to Ontario's School Plan](#)

CTV News

[Teachers, parents express concerns about Ontario's return to school plan](#)

Global News

[Ontario schools shift to virtual learning amid surge in COVID-19 cases](#)

Global News Radio

[Toronto Today with Greg Brady \(January 12\)](#)

Zoomer Radio

[In-person learning to resume Monday, January 17](#)

CityNews Ottawa – Rob Snow Show

[Teachers' union concerned new COVID-19 safety measures may not be in place before Jan. 17 school reopening](#)

Local Districts

CBC Sudbury

[Sudbury-area teachers' unions anticipate staff shortages, safety concerns in back-to-class plan](#)

CBC Windsor

['A lot of anxiety': Return of in-person learning met with mixed emotions across Windsor-Essex](#)

Belleville Intelligencer

[Challenges remain with online school](#)

Hamilton

[Teacher union local in Hamilton urges for continued reporting of COVID-19 cases](#)

Collingwood Today

[Teachers' union rep says province has 'weak reopening strategy' in place for Monday](#)

iHeartRadio Ottawa

['Word will get around' about COVID-19 cases and absences when schools reopen, Etches says](#)

District 30 – Provincial Schools Authority Teachers

[Closing residences for blind and deaf children unacceptable: Advocates](#)