

COVID Update #31

Over the last two weeks, there have been increasing reports of COVID infections in schools and the community. Furthermore, there is growing recognition worldwide that this infection is airborne. Despite the recent lifting of COVID-19 mandates in most public settings and schools in Ontario, and a resulting presumption that the pandemic is over, OSSTF/FEESO continues to maintain regular meetings with epidemiologist Dr. Amy Greer and consultations with legal counsel to best inform and protect our members. Unfortunately, the current public health metrics demonstrate that, contrary to what many members of the public are being led to believe, the pandemic is most definitely not over and there is still much to do to ensure that members and students are protected despite the lifting of mandates.

The rapid spread of the BA.2 omicron variant coupled with the removal of most protective measures has resulted in pandemic Wave Six in Ontario. While it is apparent that the provincial government prefers to ignore the evidence of this sixth wave, the fact is that as the number of infections grow, hospitalizations for COVID-19 will also increase (23% higher than last week). Best estimates from wastewater testing suggest that Ontario is currently seeing between 30,000 and 35,000 NEW infections each day. The BA.2 wave we are currently experiencing will very likely place significant stress on our healthcare settings and healthcare resources more broadly.

What is OSSTF/FEESO doing?

Provincial Office is committed to continuing our regular meetings with Dr. Greer and legal counsel to make sure members and local leaders have accurate and current information regarding the ongoing pandemic. An informed membership is key to ensuring the protection of every member. OSSTF/FEESO continues to exert pressure on the Ministers of Health and Education through regular demands advocating for the protection of our members even though the government has declared the pandemic to be over. This advocacy is done through letters from the President directly to the Ministers, media appearances and participation at various Ministry tables. Templates of letters also advocating for preventative health and safety measure to protect our members and school community are regularly sent to district presidents encouraging them to continue these conversations with their local Boards and public health units.

What you can do:

- **Make sure you are fully vaccinated.** The good news is that vaccines still provide an important layer of protection against the most severe outcomes but there are many vulnerable people in our communities who are not able to rely on vaccine protection (children under the age of 5, immunocompromised individuals, and vulnerable older adults). Infections in these individuals (even if they have been vaccinated) can be life-threatening. Many people have higher risk people in their households and families that they need to help to protect. If you are eligible for a third dose of vaccine (everyone over the age of 12), and have not yet received it, get your third dose. A third dose helps to reduce your risk of infection as well as serious disease should you become infected.
- **Wear a mask** in all indoor spaces (to protect against inhalation of virus particles that float in the air like cigarette smoke).
- **Stay home** if you have any symptoms or are feeling unwell. Respect the quarantine days following infection.
- **If you test positive** for COVID-19, take a picture of each positive test with proof of date to support filing a WSIB claim if warranted.

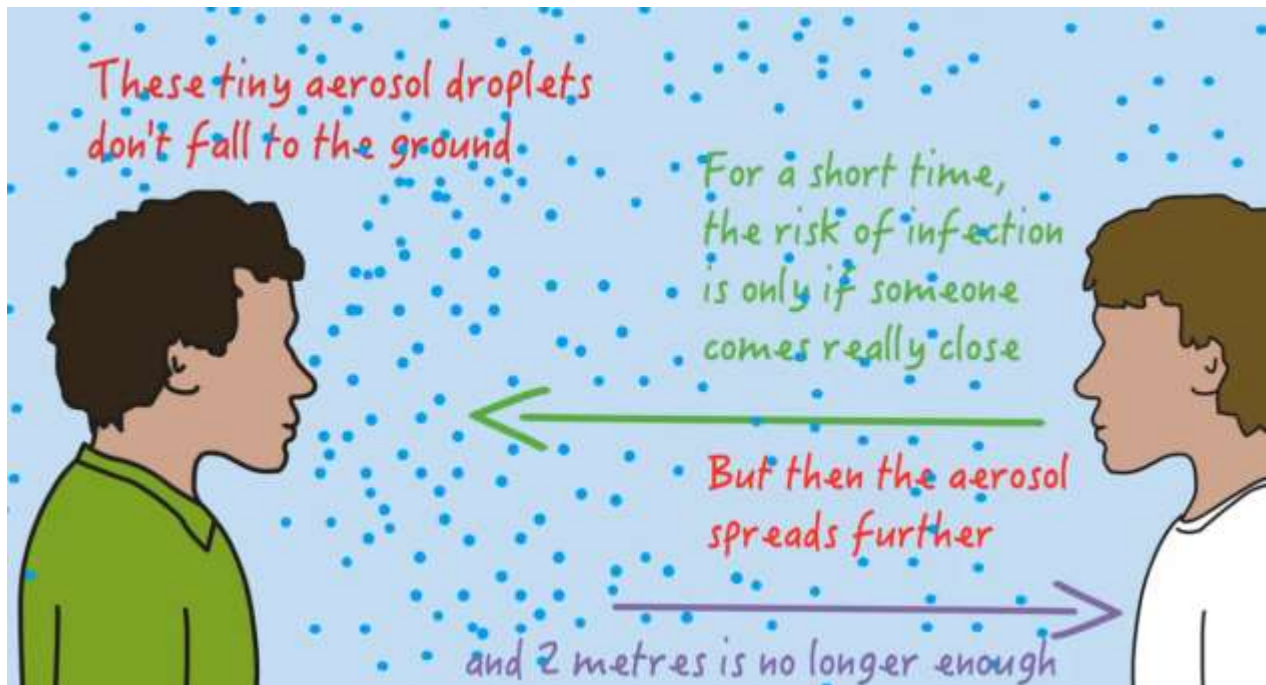
COVID-19 is an air-borne virus

The Ontario Science table released information in December of 2021 just before the holiday season in their document, Ask Ontario's Science Table: Omicron Edition: "SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) is airborne which means it can float around indoors and linger unless the air in the room moves out of the room as quickly as possible." <https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/sciencebrief/ask-ontarios-science-table-omicron-edition/download.pdf>

The White House also recently published a [blog post](#) titled "Let's Clear the Air on COVID," describing the virus as primarily transmitted through aerosols—small, tiny airborne particles.

"Though some experts around the world have been arguing that point for years, and subsequently advocating for respirator use and enhanced ventilation systems, this is the first time the White House has formally acknowledged that aerosol transmission has been the primary driver of the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, it has turned away from the language used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)."

(taken from CIDRAP article: "White House diverges from CDC, focuses on aerosol COVID spread" <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2022/03/white-house-diverges-cdc-focuses-aerosol-covid-spread>)



Short videos about airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from University of Oxford.

<https://www.phc.ox.ac.uk/research/resources/aerosols-and-making-spaces-space>