

September 9, 2020

Statement from Board of Health Chair Joe Cressy on Toronto Public Health's COVID-19 School Protocol

Opening schools for in-class learning is a significant test of how we handle the next stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. That's why it is crucial that we do everything we can to get it right.

Over the summer, our team at Toronto Public Health has been hard at work providing advice and guidance to the Government of Ontario and the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board on enhanced measures for a safe school reopening.

These measures include recommendations on ensuring adequate space for physical distancing of 6 feet (or 2 metres) among students; facial coverings for all students where possible; prioritizing resources and supports for schools in high-needs areas; exploring new testing options for homes and schools; and encouraging a flexible start date – many of which have been adopted by the TDSB and TCDSB.

With schools opening next week, Toronto Public Health has now developed protocols to manage and respond to any potential cases of COVID-19 within the school system. These protocols are in addition to the team of over 70 public health nurses who are providing on-the-ground support to schools, as well as advice, training, and education to staff and families.

If a child or staff member at a Toronto school tests positive for COVID-19, Toronto Public Health has outlined the procedures that will be in place, on the [COVID-19: School Information for Parents & Caregivers](#) webpage. These include:

- All parents with a child attending the school will be notified by Toronto Public Health if there is a positive case in the school. The identity of the person who tested positive for COVID-19 will not be shared as this is personal health information.
- Toronto Public Health will lead the case and contact tracing. This includes working with the school to find out who the child or staff member had contact with while they may have been contagious.
- Depending on the timeline of the case, all students in the same class cohort will be required to self-isolate for a period of 14 days at home.
- Toronto Public Health will advise students who have been asked to self-isolate when they can return to school.
- Other students in the school should be monitored for symptoms, but if they are not a close contact of the case, they do not need to self-isolate or stay home unless directed to by Toronto Public Health.

Toronto Public Health is also responsible for declaring an outbreak, which occurs when there are two or more positive cases in a school, within a 14-day period, with at least one infection traced back to the school environment. Direction during an outbreak will be provided by Toronto Public Health, and may include measures such as transportation to and from school or before and after school care.

It is important to note that an outbreak does not, in and of itself, trigger a school to close – this is a decision that will be made based on various factors by Toronto Public Health.

These are challenging times, and preparation is key. As our Medical Officer of Health Dr. de Villa has noted, with increased movement of people as our city opens back up, we have to prepare ourselves for when COVID-19 is located in schools. That's why it is so important that we have clear processes and procedures in place that will mitigate transmission and help to keep us all safe.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Cressy', with a long, sweeping underline.

Joe Cressy
Chair, Toronto Board of Health
City Councillor, Ward 10 (Spadina-Fort York)
416 392 4044
councillor_cressy@toronto.ca