

September 4, 2020

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Dear Parents and Families:

Going back to school can be challenging in the best of times and heading back in the midst of a global pandemic is of course even more complex. I want to acknowledge the varied emotions that families may be feeling, such as excitement, worry, fear, relief, uncertainty, and more. While there will be changes, if you have chosen in-school learning, the key school experience will be much the same as before—your children will learn in class with their teacher and see friends.

Everyone plays an active role in keeping our kids safe during the 2020/21 school year. The attached “Top 10 COVID-19 Basic Rules for Safe Schools” provides simple yet effective guidance for a safe return to school. These rules are endorsed by Medical Officers of Health and Directors of Education from across the North. Please review them very carefully.

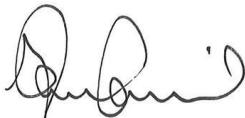
Remember that screening your child(ren) daily for illness and potential COVID-19 symptoms is a must. More details about screening are in the attached document. Children with symptoms must stay home. When it is time for a student to return to school, a verbal attestation that a student has tested negative or consulted with their health care provider is enough—there is no need to provide a medical note or proof of a negative test.

Please accept my sincere gratitude and admiration for all parents, guardians, educators, students themselves, and all who support students, for all you have done to flatten the curve of the first wave of COVID-19. You have sacrificed much and made school 2020/21 reopening a possibility.

And whether you have chosen in-school or virtual learning, Timiskaming Health Unit is committed to supporting you and your schools as we begin this next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. For additional information about COVID-19 and resources, please visit timiskaminghu.com.

Congratulations students and parents and guardians—you have my very best wishes for the coming school year.

Sincerely,



Dr. Glenn Corneil
Acting Medical Officer of Health/CEO

Encl.

Top 10 COVID-19 Basic Rules for Safe Schools

- 1. The best way to protect schools and support a successful school reopening is to keep COVID-19 out of our communities.** Now, more than ever, we need to recommit to COVID-19 prevention. Follow the guidance set out by your local health unit.
- 2. Make COVID-19 symptom screening part of your daily routine.** Just like brushing your teeth every morning, checking for COVID-19 symptoms and using a COVID-19 self-assessment tool (e.g. <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>), are essential parts of your daily habits.
- 3. Got symptoms? Stay home!** Now is not the time to “tough it out” when you are under the weather. No one will thank you for showing up to school sick. When in doubt, wait it out—and let your school know!
- 4. Have a “plan B”.** Things can change quickly with COVID-19. You know your “plan A”. Have a back-up plan so you can deal with unexpected changes caused by COVID-19 in your school, like needing to stay home and being prepared to shift from in school learning to distance learning, or a combination of both.
- 5. Talk to each other.** Discuss different age-appropriate scenarios and role play them to support kids in how to handle them safely. Examples include situations in the school or classroom related to masks, distancing, touchless greetings, or handwashing, and getting to and from school.
- 6. Stay informed.** School boards and public health units post valuable information on their websites and on social media. It’s also available by phone. School boards are required to post COVID-19 case information and share any real-time impacts on their schools, such as class dismissals or school closures.
- 7. Be prepared.** This year back-to-school supplies include non-medical masks. Follow your school’s policies on what to bring and what they will supply.
- 8. Get involved.** As we work through this together, we will face unknowns and unexpected situations. Be solution oriented and know that we all have the same aim. Share your observations and your suggestions with your school.
- 9. Take care of yourself.** You may feel alone as a student or someone who cares for a student. Unsettling feelings at school re-entry are very normal—and even more so right now with a global pandemic in our midst. You are never as alone as you feel. Whether you need clinical information or mental health supports—reach out for help when you need it.
- 10. Be COVID kind. Practise kindness, patience, and gratitude—we are all in this together.**

