

SMDHU RESPONSE TO LIFTING OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES IN SCHOOLS

March 21, 2022

To parents/guardians and students in Simcoe Muskoka:

As announced by the provincial government, effective March 21, 2022, there is no longer the requirement for school staff, students and/or visitors to wear masks indoors at school. We know that this is welcome news for some people, and we also understand the concern this may be causing others. We continue to advise people to wear masks in indoor public places and workplaces because that is where COVID-19 spreads easily and because of the ongoing transmission taking place in our communities. We know that many students and staff may choose to continue to wear masks at times, or consistently for the remainder of the school year. We are working closely with schools to support mask-friendly environments for those choosing and/or required to wear a mask at school. We encourage school boards and schools to promote respectful, welcoming, and inclusive practices and communications within their school communities.

Even though wearing a mask indoors is no longer mandated there are still a few situations in which masks are required:

- Upon return from international travel, you must wear a mask at all times when in public spaces (including schools and child care), maintain a list of all close contacts for your first 14 days in Canada, and monitor yourself for signs and symptoms of COVID-19. **This applies to you and your children if you travelled over March Break, or plan to travel in the near future.**
- During a self-monitoring period, you must wear a well-fitted mask in all public settings and avoid activities where you need to take off your mask (for example, playing a wind instrument in music class or playing high-contact sports).

Our common goal is to keep students at school for in-person learning and to promote overall mental, social, and physical health. The lifting of most mandatory public health measures and the ongoing spread of COVID-19 in our communities require that we work together to limit the spread of COVID-19 in schools. It is important that people continue with the following protective practices to reduce their risk:

- Completing the [COVID-19 School and Childcare screening tool](#) daily before school.
- Follow the instructions in the guidance provided once complete.
- Self-monitor, isolate if symptoms develop, and use Rapid Antigen Tests.
- Accept all COVID vaccination doses you are eligible for. Find more information at [smdhu.org/getvaccinated](https://www.smdhu.org/getvaccinated).
- Physically distance where possible.
- Practice good hand hygiene.
- Wear a mask in indoor public and workplace settings (even when not required to do so).

As a reminder, if you have any [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 you should assume that you may have the virus and are contagious, you must isolate:

- For at least five days if you are fully vaccinated or are under 12 years of age. Continue wearing a mask after self-isolation from day six to 10.
- For at least 10 days if you are over the age of 12 and not fully vaccinated, are immunocompromised, or live in a highest-risk setting.

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The Ministry of Health has also updated the guidance for close contacts in households and in the community:

If you live with someone who has symptoms of or has tested positive for COVID-19, you do not need to isolate if one of the following applies to you:

- You have previously tested positive for COVID-19 (based on Rapid Antigen or PCR test results) in the last 90 days and do not have symptoms.
- You are over 18 years old and have received a COVID-19 booster dose.
- You are under 18 years old and are considered [fully vaccinated](#).

Instead for 10 days after exposure you are required to:

- Self-monitor for symptoms.
- Wear a mask and avoid activities where mask removal would be necessary.
- Do not visit anyone who is at higher risk of illness, such as seniors, or any highest-risk settings (unless you previously tested positive in past 90 days).

If you do not meet any of the criteria above, you must isolate while the person with symptoms/positive test result isolates (or for 10 days if you are immunocompromised).

If you have been exposed to someone who has symptoms or has COVID-19 who you don't live with, you are required to:

- [Self-monitor](#) for symptoms for 10 days after your last exposure.
- Wear a mask, avoid activities where mask removal is necessary (such as dining out, high contact sports) and follow all other public health measures if leaving home.
- Do not visit any highest-risk settings (such as long-term care or retirement homes) or people who may be at higher risk of illness (such as seniors) for 10 days after your last exposure.

Together with our school community partners, we look forward to welcoming students back from March break.

We know that there may be questions and concerns in response to changes by the province in managing COVID-19, and you can be reassured that we will continue to work with school partners to support a safe and healthy school environment.