

November 15, 2022

Dear Parent or Guardian,

**Re: High Rates of Illness in Children**

With the cooler weather upon us, we are unfortunately seeing an increase in a variety of respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19, Influenza (Flu) and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). Yesterday, Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Kieran Moore, strongly recommended that Ontarians wear masks in all indoor public settings, including schools. Ontario is facing the “triple threat” of higher and earlier than normal rates of respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza as well as the ongoing risk of COVID-19. Young children are at increased risk of serious illness, and we are already seeing the impact on the health care system with more medical visits and hospitalizations. These trends are expected to continue as the fall season progresses and we spend more time indoors.

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) continues to recommend that all members of our school community take protective measures as part of the school routine this fall and winter.

**Know your Risk**

The [Simcoe Muskoka COVID-19 Community Risk Level](#) is updated weekly. The COVID-19 Community Risk Level will help you determine the best ways to protect yourself and others from COVID-19 infection and serious illness. Risk of infection and severe illness increases as community, personal and situational risk increases. As risks increase, add more layers of protection. The more precautions you take the better you and others around you will be protected.

**Wear a Mask**

**The health unit strongly recommends that all individuals wear a well-fitted three-layer mask or medical mask in indoor public settings, including school.** This recommendation includes children two to five years of age if they can tolerate a mask. In addition, masking at home is strongly recommended if you have symptoms and have at-risk people in your household, including children under five years of age, older adults, or those with medical conditions.

**Screen Daily and Stay Home if Feeling Unwell**

Everyone should screen for symptoms daily using the [Screening Tool](#) and follow the instructions. Keep your child home if they are sick with any symptom(s) of COVID-19, cold or flu.

**Get Vaccinated**

Getting the flu shot and staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations is the best way to prevent serious illness. Visit our [website](#) to find out what options are available in your community.

**Wash Your Hands and Clean High Touch Surfaces**

Wash your hands often using proper hand hygiene and help/remind your child to as well. Disinfect high touch surfaces in your home often.

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When we use many layers of protection, we lower the risk of illness for ourselves and our children. For more information, contact Health Connection at 1-877-721-7520, or visit: <https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/COVID-19/going-to-school>.

Sincerely,

**ORIGINAL Signed By:**

Charles Gardner, MD, CCFP, MHSc, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health

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