

Memo #24

Date: April 8, 2021

To: Simcoe Muskoka Catholic Elementary Teachers

Re: **Latest from the Government; Letter to Public Health Units**

Latest Information from the Government

Yesterday, the Government of Ontario issued a Stay-at-Home order, but that order does not change what is happening in schools.

Minister of Education Lecce, stated the following:

- Vaccine rollout to begin for eligible education staff
- Asymptomatic Testing
- On-Site Confirmation of Self-Screening
- Refresher Training
- Outdoor Instruction
- Enhanced Cleaning during the Break
- Letter to Parents

At first glance the public may think the government is improving the health and safety for staff and students in schools. Unfortunately, this is another band-aid solution and public relations play by the Ontario government.

Details of the announcement and OECTA opinion:

- **Vaccine Rollout:** Education workers who provide direct support to students with special needs across the province and all education workers in hotspot areas.

This is some progress, but not enough, as education workers should be prioritized for vaccinations during the April Break.

- **Asymptomatic Testing:** during the week of April 12th to 18th pharmacies will offer testing and assessment and accept appointments for students and education workers.

Teachers will have to use their break to go for an asymptomatic test. This does nothing upon the return after the break

- **On-site confirmation of Self-Screening:** the expectation is Elementary schools will be expected to use on-site confirmation of self-screening for all students.

This has been in place in Secondary schools since the return from remote learning/teaching. The responsibility has fallen on teachers to check (daily) whether a student has had their self-screening completed by their parent/guardian. If it has not been completed, they have been directed to complete ASAP. It is unknown at this point what the process will be for those students who haven't had a self-screening completed.

- **Refresher Training:** Boards will ensure that staff are prepared to provide **students** with a refresher on health and safety measures on the first day of class after the break

The Ministry will be releasing a health and safety webinar that staff can **voluntarily** review over the break. More information is to follow, which I am sure will be relayed over the break.

- **Outdoor Instruction**

This is actually a point of emphasis from the Ministry of Education. It feels like they came up with this great idea: teach outside during the better weather. It is insulting and disrespectful.

- **Enhanced Cleaning during the break**

Another big idea from the government, but “enhanced” cleaning has been done for years during the March Break. Enhanced does not mean new, or improved, just cleaning while no one is in the building.

- **Letter to Parents:** the government has provided Boards with a template of a letter to send to parents to remind them to continue to adhere to COVID-19 health and safety measures.

This government has time and again reminded people to follow COVID protocols, and yet here we are in the midst of the third wave.

To summarize, the measures being put in place are more PR stunts than actual measures that will make schools safer.

Letter to Public Health Units

Please see attached the letter written to our two Public Health Units in our Board (Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and North Bay and Parry Sound District Health Unit) requesting better safety measures and for them to act similarly to Peel, Toronto, Wellington Health Units etc., the request to have teachers prioritized for vaccinations and to move schools to remote learning/teaching.

OECTA Simcoe Muskoka realizes the potential move to remote learning/teaching is not an easy one, but the facts that daily COVID case numbers continue to rise, the refusal of the government to admit that schools are a place of transmission, and the continual reluctance to place meaningful health and safety measures in schools creates fear and anxiety and the real possibility of contracting COVID.

If you have any concerns, please contact the Unit office at 705-733-9625 or 1 800 558 4815