



April 13, 2022

Re: Masking recommendation in York Region schools

Dear staff members, students and families,

The province of Ontario is currently experiencing a sixth wave of COVID-19 due to the high transmissibility of the Omicron BA.2 variant. As a result, York Region Public Health, along with York Region District School Board (YRDSB) and York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) are **strongly recommending** all students, teachers, staff and visitors wear a mask in school when they return to school on Tuesday, April 19, 2022. We will continue to closely monitor our trends in York Region and will communicate any further changes to this recommendation.

This advice is aligned with statements made by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health on April 11, 2022, which noted that while masks are no longer mandatory, they are now strongly recommended in indoor spaces.

Until now, York Region Public Health has strongly encouraged masking in areas that are crowded, where there is close contact or where spaces may be confined with poor ventilation. We are now recommending that all students and staff wear a **well-fitted three-layer mask** in classrooms, common areas, including hallways, and while using school transportation.

The use of non-medical masks is one of several pandemic control measures that has been effective at reducing COVID-19 transmission in the community and in our schools. Masking has played an important role in protecting ourselves and our loved ones who are at high risk of hospitalization, severe infection and death. Masking is effective at slowing the transmission of COVID-19. It helps to preserve the capacity in our hospitals and prevents essential workers from becoming infected.

In the past two weeks, both YRDSB and YCDSB have noted a significant increase in student and staff absences. Wearing a mask will slow transmission of COVID-19 and help alleviate staff shortages that might otherwise lead to school closures. It will also protect your child from contracting COVID-19 and missing in-person learning.

Many students will be returning to school from commemorating holidays with their loved ones and there may be a resulting increase in exposures. Wearing a mask will offer an added layer of protection for yourself and others around you. We would like to remind everyone to show kindness and consideration as we continue to navigate this pandemic. COVID-19 still represents a health risk that we are all working through at our own pace.

While masking continues to offer protection against COVID-19, **the best form of protection is to get vaccinated**. Anyone aged five or older can walk into any York Region vaccination clinic to get a first, second or third dose. Appointments are also available. More information on when and where you can get vaccinated is available at york.ca/COVID19Vaccine.

Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership as we safely provide in-person learning.

Sincerely,

Dr. Barry Pakes
Medical Officer of Health
York Region Public Health

Louise Sirisko
Director of Education
York Region District School Board

Domenic Scuglia
Director of Education
York Catholic District School Board