

MEDIA RELEASE

Keeping Schools Safe From COVID-19



For Immediate Release — Wednesday, September 23, 2020

Timmins, Ontario — Today, Dr. Lianne Catton, Medical Officer of Health for the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU), is offering guidance and clarification on the steps that need to be taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19 for students and school staff. “We are collaborating closely with all schools in the area using the protocols outlined by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education,” Dr. Catton said. “In order to keep our schools safe, and open, we all need to continue to work together. One of the most important steps for parents to take is to actively screen their children every morning.”

“A self-assessment tool for school screening is available online at covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening. Please screen your child every morning before sending them to school. This screening tool will help you determine whether you can safely send your child to school each day.”

“There has been an update regarding when an individual is required to stay home and self-isolate,” Dr. Catton stated. “If a child has symptoms of COVID-19, they must stay home and self-isolate. But this does not mean other people in the household, without symptoms, must self-isolate. Because there is not a high level of COVID-19 spreading in the Porcupine Health Unit area at this time, other household members can self-monitor, unless otherwise directed by public health. This direction may change if we see increased spread of COVID-19 in our region.”

The Porcupine Health Unit recommends that all individuals who have symptoms get tested. “If one person in your household is showing COVID-like symptoms, only that person needs to get tested,” said Dr. Catton. “Everyone should actively self-monitor until the symptomatic person receives a negative test result, again, unless otherwise directed by public health.” To arrange testing, call your local Assessment Centre. If you do not have an assessment centre in your community, call the PHU or your health care provider. “Please be patient,” she urges, “as there has been an increased demand for testing and all assessment centres are working hard to ensure that those who need it get tested.”

Dr. Catton also noted that if your child is not well, the process for determining if your child can return to school is more involved. She encourages parents to review the process on the PHU website at phu.fyi/covid-school-testing and then call the health unit’s COVID-19 information line at (705-267-1181 or 1-800-461-1818) if they have any questions.

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She confirms that documented proof of a negative test result or a medical note from the student's health care provider will not be required for return to school; however, depending on the student's school, parents or guardians may have to complete a "return to school" form.

"We know return to school has been challenging this year," said Dr. Catton. "Now, more than ever, we need to support one another and stay kind. We all need to play our part in keeping our schools and our communities safe and healthy. Thank you for your patience and commitment."

The Porcupine Health Unit is located in Northeastern Ontario, serving the entire Cochrane District and Hornepayne, in Algoma District. The main office is located in Timmins, Ontario, with branch offices in Cochrane, Hearst, Hornepayne, Iroquois Falls, Kapuskasing, Matheson, Moosonee and Smooth Rock Falls.

Additional COVID-19 information can be found on the Porcupine Health Unit's website at phu.fyi/coronavirus.

Visit Ontario's website (covid-19.ontario.ca) to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.

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