

Elgin St. Thomas Site

Administrative Office
1230 Talbot Street
St. Thomas, ON
N5P 1G9

Woodstock Site

410 Buller Street
Woodstock, ON
N4S 4N2



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From the Office of Dr. Joyce Lock, Medical Officer of Health, Southwestern Public Health

Process for Suspected COVID-19 Cases in Schools

In collaboration with system partners, [here are several resources](#) to clarify processes for suspected school-based COVID-19 cases. These are aligned with Middlesex-London Health Unit and Ontario Health West teams to limit confusion among cross-regional stakeholders. Refer [here](#) for the most current versions as materials may be updated regularly.

Below is a summary of the responsibilities expected of all stakeholders as we navigate suspected COVID-19 cases in schools. All processes apply to childcare centres as well.

Daily Self-Screening

- Parents and guardians of school-aged children, as well as school staff/visitors, are expected to use the [provincial online screening tool](#) prior to leaving home each day.
- You may proactively refer patients to the [Return to School Decision Tree for Families](#) to inform their next steps in the event of a failed screening.
- Remind caregivers that these materials are [updated frequently](#).

Siblings and Household Contacts

- If an individual fails the daily COVID-19 screening tool, they must self-isolate immediately (alongside a caregiver if they are a minor).
- At this stage, no other household contacts are required to self-isolate.
- Caregivers should refer to the [Return to School Decision Tree for Families](#) to inform their next steps.
- If the individual does not seek testing or an alternate diagnosis from a health care provider, **then all household contacts must self-isolate for 14 days** and have symptoms improving over a 24-hour period before returning to school/work.

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School Exclusion Referrals

- School administration can exclude a student or staff member/visitor from school at any time throughout the school day.
- The symptomatic individual is required to self-isolate immediately (alongside a caregiver if they are a minor), and are advised to either:
 - visit urgent care if required **OR**
 - seek a COVID-19 test **OR**
 - contact their primary care provider.
- If an individual declines the above actions, **they must self-isolate for 14 days** and have symptoms improving over a 24-hour period before returning to school.

COVID-19 Assessment

- Follow the updated [Ministry COVID-19 Testing Guidance](#) if an individual in a school setting has symptoms of COVID-19. Symptomatic individuals can be referred to a local COVID-19 Assessment Centre to book an appointment-only test.
- Refer to Public Health Ontario for [specimen collection guidance](#).

Alternate Diagnosis

- Primary care providers are advised to use clinical judgment to determine if an individual requires an alternate diagnosis, particularly if symptoms are not new, or are unusual or progressive. Use the included [Health Care Practitioner's COVID-19 Testing Guide](#) (pg. 6) for support.
- **Please advise patients that alternate viral infections cannot be diagnosed** – a COVID-19 test would be recommended in such situations, using clinical judgment.

Negative COVID-19 Result

- In school settings, individuals who receive a negative COVID-19 result cannot return to school until they have symptoms improving over a 24-hour period. They are also reminded to self-monitor and to contact their primary care provider if symptoms progress.

Positive COVID-19 Result

- Public health will notify individuals who receive a positive COVID-19 result to begin contact tracing and case management.
- Public health will also notify and work with the school and school boards to inform next steps.

Return-to-School

- Those who are excluded from school are not required to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test result before returning to school. This is also advised for childcare settings.
- Individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 will be advised by public health for when it is safe to return to school.
- Those who decline a test or an alternate diagnosis from a health care provider **must remain self-isolated with all household contacts for 14 days** and have symptoms improving over a 24-hour period before returning to school.

When to Contact Public Health

- Discourage patients from contacting or visiting public health for COVID-19-related school exclusions. Instead, all individuals who fail the COVID-19 school screening should be referred to the [Return to School Decision Tree for Families](#).
- Public health will notify all individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 or are deemed a high-risk contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case.
- General COVID-19 public health questions can be directed to 1-800-922-0096 ext. 9.

MS Teams Q&A Session

Southwestern Public Health is hosting a Primary Care Q&A on Wednesday, September 30th at noon to help answer any questions you have regarding these processes. Please expect an email from my team with details to participate. We welcome your questions prior to this session. A recording will be available for those who cannot join.

Truly,

Dr. Joyce Lock
Medical Officer of Health
Southwestern Public Health
1-800-922-0096, ext.1255
jllock@swpublichealth.ca