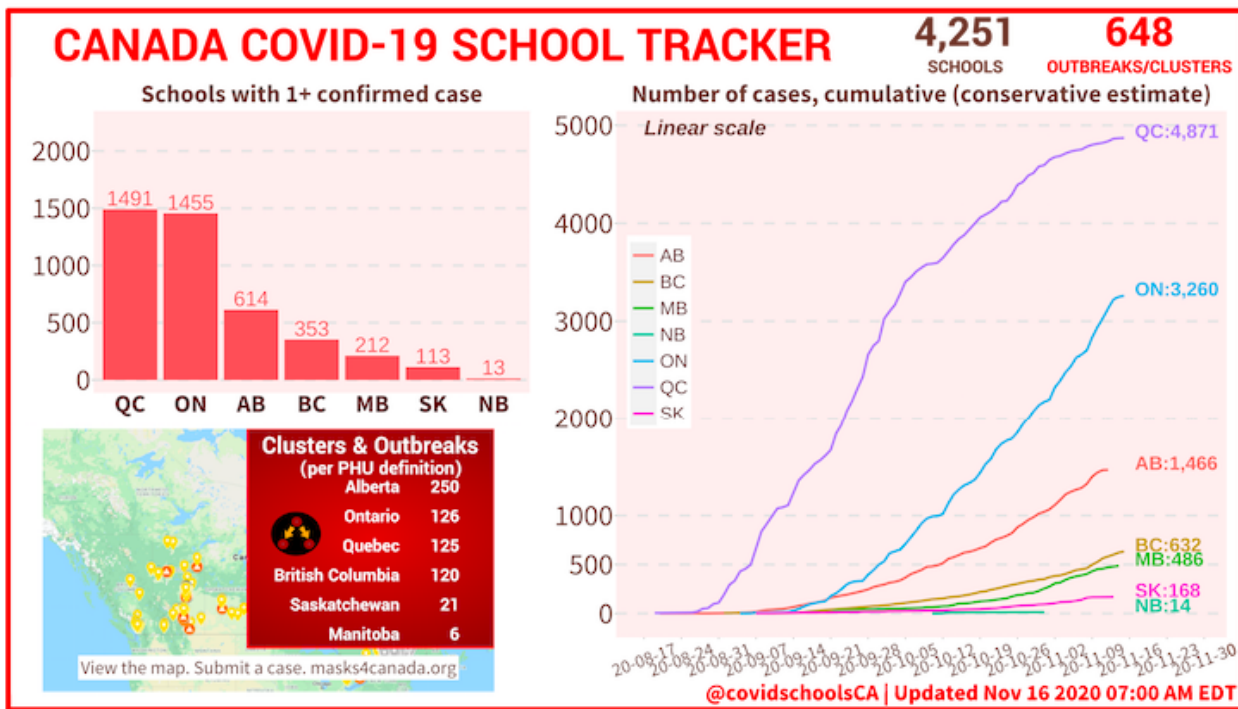




November 17th, 2020

To our Premiers, Ministers of Education, and Medical Officers,

COVID-19 cases are increasing at an alarming rate across multiple Provinces of Canada; the sole exceptions are the Atlantic Provinces and the Territories. Our schools now reflect these rising infection rates; according to our team's highly-popular Canada-wide COVID-19 school tracker, 10,897 cases have been associated with 4,251 schools (see chart below; see map at <https://masks4canada.org/canada-covid-19-school-case-tracker/>).





Schools reflect the community prevalence of COVID-19 and drive the virus' spread as we have seen at least 648 school outbreaks nationally [1] [2] [3] [4]. School closure should be the last option, as educational facilities underpin our communities and economy. Therefore, we urge you to implement these evidence-based measures to protect our children and teachers and reduce spread into the community. **Specifically, we urge for the following actions:**

1. **Ventilation and Mandatory Masking:** The WHO and Health Canada now acknowledge that airborne transmission is an important means of COVID-19 spread [5]. We ask that you provide funding to improve ventilation in schools and mandate masks for grades K-12.
 - a. **Improving ventilation:** Identify and prioritize classrooms with poor natural or mechanical ventilation. Supply CO2 meters as an affordable means to measure ventilation rates in classrooms. Provide funds to school boards to upgrade ventilation in identified classrooms (HEPA filters rated MERV-13 or higher), and put appropriately-sized portable HEPA air filters in identified classrooms. Consider implementing CO2 sensors in classrooms to help identify problem spaces during use. Turn up the heat and leave windows open.
 - b. **Extending Winter Break:** Consider extending winter break to two months and shorten summer break to 2-3 weeks. This way, we can break the circuit of current increasing cases. Use the two months over the winter to upgrade/improve ventilation for all schools. When school resumes after the extended winter break, it will be easier to have more classes outdoors during the Spring and Summer.
 - c. **Mandatory masking:** Mandate masks in classrooms, requiring a 3-layered cloth or disposable mask for all students from grades K-12. Require PPE, including surgical masks and face shields/goggles for teachers and staff. Masks need to be worn in classrooms, hallways, indoor gym class, and common areas, even with physical distancing. Individuals can remove their masks during mealtimes and when outdoors with physical distancing. There should be no singing or wind instruments, as these produce infectious aerosols.
 - d. **Reduce class sizes:** Cap class sizes to 15 people to allow for more physical distancing. Explore other buildings such as libraries and community centres as alternative spaces to spread out students.
2. **Rapid Testing:** Rapid tests should be prioritized for staff and students use in our schools, rather than for international travellers.



3. **In-person and virtual learning:** Provide a virtual option for parents/students that do not feel comfortable attending school in person. There also needs to be a threshold for switching from in-person learning to virtual learning when the test positivity reaches a certain percentage in the community.
4. **100% transparency on school cases and outbreaks:** Due to a lack of transparency and reporting from the government, we created a COVID tracker for cases and outbreaks in schools across Canada (<https://masks4canada.org/canada-covid-19-school-case-tracker/>). This should be the responsibility of Public Health and the government, not civilians. We demand public notification of every case and outbreak in schools be required of all school divisions. This data should be clearly accessible on school division websites.
5. **Contact tracing:** Public Health has been overwhelmed that contact tracing has not been feasible anymore in some regions and has been left to the overwhelmed schools to manage. We need to hire and train more people who are currently unemployed or on CERB/EI to help with this.

Schools form the bedrock of our communities and economy. We understand the value and importance of in-person learning for students, but the current strategy is unsustainable. Our hospitals and ICU beds are almost at capacity in many Provinces, and it will be hard to keep schools open safely. We implore you to make the necessary changes in schools to be safer for our students, teachers, and communities.

Sincerely,

Masks4Canada

<https://masks4canada.org/about/team/>

References:

- [1] <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/ontario-s-covid-19-cases-in-schools-child-care-centres-as-of-nov-13-1.5103839>
- [2] <https://mtltimes.ca/life/health/experts-say-montreal-schools-now-main-source-spreading-covid-19/>
- [3] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.5694/mja2.50823>
- [4] <https://www.princeton.edu/news/2020/09/30/largest-covid-19-contact-tracing-study-date-finds-children-key-spread-evidence?fbclid=IwAR2BUr6lmcVBKaWiYIkueDZwjxRqY7aviicGd6KMLvsuQvXsxwBCAvEtVZ8>
- [5] <https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.5789906>