



January 5th, 2021

Dear Public Health and School Boards,

We are Masks4Canada, a grassroots volunteer group that advocates for safety measures that can reduce the spread and severity of COVID-19 in the community including mandatory masking, physical distancing, hand hygiene, rapid testing, vaccination, and improving ventilation. We believe that schools are not only a reflection of community cases of COVID-19 but may also be one of the drivers of community spread [1] [2].

We have been advocating for the following measures in schools to the Ministers of Education and Chief Medical Officers of each province [3]:

- Mandatory masking for students K-12 anytime they are indoors except when eating
- Improving ventilation systems in schools, providing portable HEPA filters, and encouraging windows to be open
- Reducing class sizes to a maximum of 15 people
- Providing both in-person and virtual learning options
- Having a threshold for switching to virtual learning for a short period of time over the winter when the test positivity reaches a certain percentage in the community, which we believe we have currently surpassed that threshold
- Ensuring that all students can get access to internet and technology required for virtual learning, and a parent/guardian is allowed to work from home or is subsidized to stay home without risk of losing his/her job
- 100% transparency on school cases and outbreaks
- Screening with rapid testing, contact tracing, and isolating

We understand that some of these measures require funding and implementation from the provincial government, but some changes can be done at the municipal and school board level including mandatory masking starting from kindergarten which has already been implemented by the Toronto District School Board since September, keeping windows open and using portable HEPA filters, providing virtual learning options for those who request it, and screening with rapid testing.



We are therefore asking that **rapid asymptomatic testing** in all school age children, staff, bus drivers, and educators be conducted as a means of curtailing rising cases across the country, particularly before returning to in-person schooling for January 2021. We recognize that rapid testing in schools has recently been an initiative spearheaded by Public Health units across the province. As children and youth may be asymptomatic carriers, we believe that one of the key ways to identify cases and reduce the risk of transmission is to identify cases in schools, thereby limiting further spread within schools and back into the community at large.

Recent volunteer based testing of students across Toronto and York Region have found that there is a significant proportion of students that have tested positive, including Thorncliffe Park Public School which confirmed > 19 cases [4] [5]. The rates of positivity in testing school sites have ranged from 0.4% (Stouffville, Ontario) to 4.5% (Markham, Ontario). Given that some of these areas were historically considered low risk areas, we urge you to continue this initiative of screening all students, not only in high risk areas but in ***all schools*** when the new year begins. We believe that rapid antigen testing would be a cost effective and accurate way to screen for COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Masks4Canada
www.masks4canada.org

- [1] <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/192/38/E1102>
- [2] <https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/montreal-schools-now-driving-force-of-covid-19-spread-experts>
- [3] <https://masks4canada.org/open-letter-to-our-premiers-ministers-of-education-and-medical-officers-dec-2020/>
- [4] <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/thorncliffe-park-public-school-covid-19-testing-1.5821673>
- [5] <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ontario-asymptomatic-testing-schools-1.5822043>