

# COVID-19 FAQ #20 Responding to COVID-19

December 9, 2020

In Update #20 on COVID-19 related issues, you will find information related to: masks and goggles; OT self-isolation and pay; updated screening tools; protecting collective agreement rights; and support for First Nations students.

**Need a refresher on ETFO's last COVID-19 update?**

[View a version of COVID-19 FAQ #19.](#)

Stay informed about your health and safety at work at [etfohealthandsafety.ca](https://etfohealthandsafety.ca).

## Education Workers' Survey

All ETFO members are encouraged to participate in the Survey of Education Workers' Experiences during the Pandemic Second Wave. This confidential survey is designed to explore the links between personal protective equipment (PPE), safe work protocols and member mental health.

ETFO partnered with the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers to develop this survey for members. Your participation will be extremely valuable in helping ETFO better understand and address the issues you continue to face. Take our confidential survey [here](#).

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Should I be wearing a face shield at all times like I do with a medical mask?**

The [Guide to reopening Ontario schools](#) states, "All school-based staff will be required to wear masks." It does not say that face shields are required to be worn, only that they will be provided to all staff. When two-metre physical distancing from students cannot be maintained in classrooms and hallways, members should wear a face shield, especially when working with students who are not required to wear a mask and/or working in close contact with students. This is because the coronavirus can enter the body through the eyes and wearing a face shield will protect eyes from droplets that are dispelled from a person who is within two metres.

School boards may have more specific requirements regarding wearing face shields than what is outlined in the government's Guide. If an educator has to work in a different cohort or when they are on lunch duty, a face shield may be required to be worn at all times when working in close contact with students, when two metres cannot be maintained or if a student is mask-exempt. In many areas of the province, particularly communities at higher risk levels, Ministry of Labour inspectors have indicated that school boards must clarify these requirements. Members should check with their board.

**The face shield I am required to wear is always fogging up. My school board also provides goggles. How do face shields and goggles differ in protection?**

Both goggles and face shields provide protection to the eyes. If the goggles have a good peripheral facial seal, they will provide more protection from respiratory droplets and possibly from small aerosol particles. A face shield protects a larger portion of the face from respiratory droplets, but does not have a good peripheral facial seal.

Other considerations may be based on the style and fit such as which ones fog up, which are more uncomfortable to wear after prolonged periods of use or are more difficult to put on or take off.

**As a daily occasional teacher, I received notification from the health authorities that I need to self-isolate for 14 days because someone at a school where I worked has tested positive for COVID-19. What are my financial options?**

ETFO continues to advocate for occasional members to be paid for days they are required by their employer to self-isolate. ETFO has asked the Ministry to review this issue and correct this inequity. The Deputy Minister was asked for an update on the issue of compensation for occasional members last week and has indicated that the matter is complex due to the varying sick leave plans in the sector. She indicated that the Ministry will have a decision very soon.

In the interim, if a daily occasional teacher or daily occasional education worker has been directed to remain at home due to COVID-19 and is not receiving paid leave from the employer for the absence, the member may be entitled to income support through the [Canada Recovery Benefit or the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit](#), subject to meeting eligibility requirements.

**I heard that some health units and/or school boards are updating their COVID-19 school screening tool and self-isolation rules. How will I know if there are updates in my area and why aren't these precautions being implemented province-wide?**

During early December, Toronto and Peel Region introduced a new COVID-19 school screening tool for parents/caregivers of students who attend schools in these areas as well as staff. There is a notice and links to this effect on the webpage for the provincial [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#).

As of December 7, updated guidance states if a student/child has one or more new or worsening COVID-19 symptoms, even minor ones such as a runny nose, parents/ caregivers will now be required to have their child stay home and self-isolate, as well as keep siblings and other children in the household home even if they do not have symptoms. In Peel, if an adult or child in the household has a symptom(s), everyone in the household should stay home and self-isolate.

It is important for all members to watch for updates from school boards and continue to complete the appropriate self-assessment each day before entering school.

**I am concerned that some individuals may not follow public health direction over the break and will be contagious when they return to school in January. Is my school board taking any additional precautions to address this?**

The Ministry of Education has informed ETFO that school boards will send resources home to families before the break with reminders about staying home over the holiday period, not travelling, not socializing with anyone outside of the individuals who live in their household and following other local public health guidelines. The government and health units will share these messages regularly throughout the break.

To address post-break concerns, the Ministry of Education has requested that ‘refresher’ materials be developed for use upon return to school in January. They would reinforce the required health and safety protocols that are in place in schools, including the importance of using the screening tool upon return. Some boards have implemented an active screening process for staff to visually check that the self-assessment was completed or verbally confirm this with the student.

If members suspect that a student and/or their family are not following protocols upon returning to school in January, they should report the hazard to the principal and/or the local health unit to investigate. If the concern is not resolved, seek support from the local ETFO office and/or health and safety representative.

**What is ETFO doing to ensure members’ collective agreement rights are protected during the pandemic?**

The 2020-2021 school year reopening process has been closely monitored by ETFO locals in conjunction with provincial Collective Bargaining Services staff. In some cases, ETFO’s intervention has dissuaded school boards from pursuing courses of action that would have resulted in collective agreement or past practice violations.

Where informal solutions could not be reached, local leaders have pursued grievances in order to protect ETFO members’ collective agreement rights. This fall, almost 100 grievances regarding reopening and pandemic issues were filed by ETFO locals across the province around the following issues:

- ETFO members being required to simultaneously provide instruction to students in face-to-face, online and/or correspondence formats (i.e., “hybrid instructional models”);
- Failure to provide paid health and safety/COVID-19 training to ETFO occasional teacher members;
- Preparation time violations in virtual classrooms and schools;
- Class size violations in virtual classrooms and schools;
- Failing to appropriately staff and/or utilize designated early childhood educators (DECEs) in virtual Kindergarten classrooms;
- Violations of staff meeting limits;
- Requiring ETFO members to do the work of other bargaining units (e.g., caretaking staff);
- Failing to replace an absent teacher with an occasional teacher; and
- Improperly deducting sick leave from members who have been directed by school boards to not attend work and seek COVID-19 testing or self-isolate.

ETFO has referred local grievances that cannot be resolved appropriately to arbitration.

### **During COVID-19, how do I talk about racism with students and/or children?**

Since the pandemic, racism has spiked and been exacerbated for some marginalized communities. ETFO has provided [resources](#) about the increase in anti-Asian racism, systemic issues of inequities that [continue to impact Indigenous communities](#), and incidents of [anti-Black racism](#) and the Black Lives movement that have been a global media focus.

Here are two resources to support members in discussing issues of race and racism with students of all ages:

- Holland Bloorview Hospital created several [resources](#) on racism, anti-racism and anti-oppression to support families and students/children.
- The Centre for Integrative Anti-Racism Studies (CIARS) has put together a [resource](#) on the experiences of Black communities in Canada and the impacts of systemic anti-Black racism.

### **Are there specific supports for First Nations students with respect to well-being and technology, given the challenges of increasing numbers and poor internet access in some communities?**

[Jordan’s Principle](#) is a child-first principle that puts the needs of First Nations children ahead of the cost-payment factor between the provincial and federal government. In the past, some First Nations children have spent years waiting for access to public services while the two levels of government battled over who would pay.

*“Jordan's Principle makes sure all First Nations children living in Canada can access the products, services and supports they need, when they need them. [Funding can help with a wide range of health, social and educational needs](#) that First Nations Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA children and youth and those with disabilities may have.”*

All First Nations children who are [eligible](#) under Jordan's Principle can apply for funds to support their unmet needs, which could fall under social, educational or health. A student may be eligible to apply for technology, internet supports, access to tutoring or special education supports like educational assistants, specific therapies or counselling. Members should connect with their board's Indigenous Education Lead to review the board policy and refer the family to a Jordan's Principle support worker to assist them throughout the [process](#).

If unsure of the local Jordan's Principle support network, direct the family to the national Jordan's Principle Call Centre at 1-855-JP-CHILD (1-855-572-4453). Requests for support for Inuit children can be made [here](#).

**I heard that staff will be expected to work from home during inclement weather days or provide learning materials for students when buses are cancelled, but schools remain open. What are my responsibilities when school buses are cancelled or schools are closed?**

Individual school boards make decisions about the operation of schools when there is inclement weather, which may be based on language in local collective agreements and/or language in local school board policies. Members are required to follow the direction of their respective board and this may include the expectation that they work from home or provide instructional materials to those students who are unable to attend school (i.e., buses are cancelled). Members who experience difficulties fulfilling their assigned responsibilities during inclement weather days should discuss this with their school principal as soon as possible.

It is ETFO's position that members should not be expected to provide instruction for both in-person learning and virtual learning during the same time period. If a member is directed to do so by their principal, they should contact their local immediately as a grievance may need to be filed. It is important that members keep their local informed of any concerns with respect to work expectations on inclement weather days so that they can continue to advocate on the member's behalf.

**The revised 2020 Mathematics curriculum includes Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). I am not sure how to assess and evaluate this strand for Term 1 Report Cards.**

Members will need time to become familiar with the skills outlined within the curriculum and understand the role that educator bias can have on the evaluation of SEL skills. As

stated in a recent Ministry memo regarding elementary reporting, “Emerging research has shown that educator bias can negatively affect the evaluation of social-emotional learning skills in relation to particular groups of students (e.g., Black, Indigenous, racialized students, male students, students with disabilities and students experiencing other socio-demographic disadvantages).”

As additional professional learning is needed in this area, the Ministry of Education has indicated that school boards may wish to instruct teachers to pause the evaluation and reporting of the overall expectations A1 related to SEL skills in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8, Mathematics (2020)* and *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8* for the 2020-2021 school year. The following comment has been provided for use: “Students’ social-emotional learning skills have not been evaluated.”

The Ministry of Education has indicated that further supports will be made available in the New Year to support educators in this targeted area. Members are also encouraged to seek ongoing professional learning regarding SEL that may occur throughout the school year by their respective school boards.

It is important that opportunities for members to self-reflect on their biases and the ways it impacts their students be built into this training. Members are also encouraged to independently explore implicit bias and the systemic barriers that exist in our society and impact students.

**For other information, please check [ETFO’s dedicated COVID-19 webpage](#).**