

COVID-19 FAQ #18 Responding to COVID-19

November 9, 2020

In Update #18 on COVID-19 related issues, you will find information related to: staff meetings; mask and ventilation issues; recording synchronous lessons; student mental health; and pandemic impacts on marginalized groups.

Need a refresher on ETFO's most recent COVID-19 update?

[View a version of FAQ update #17](#)

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Frequently Asked Questions

I am considering a vacation during my scheduled time off. Can I access a leave to quarantine when I return?

Members should stay informed of any provincial or federal travel restrictions and be aware of any federal, provincial or public health advisories concerning quarantine restrictions when returning from travel outside of Ontario. If there is a required period of quarantine following travel, members should incorporate that time into their plans so that they are able to report to work according to their regular schedule. Members should consult with their local regarding any available paid or unpaid leave that may be accessed during the regular school year following a vacation period. Members may face discipline, up to and including termination, from their employer if they choose to travel and know (or ought to have known) that they will not be fit to return to work as scheduled owing to quarantine requirements.

As a virtual school teacher, I have been asked repeatedly to attend staff meetings and professional learning sessions outside of the school day. Is there a limit to the meetings I am expected to attend each month?

Your collective agreement should have language on the number of staff meetings that members can be expected to attend in any given month. In most situations, that would be one 75-minute staff meeting. If members are being required to attend more staff meetings than permitted under their collective agreement, they should contact their local office for advice.

A student in my class repeatedly takes off their mask in defiance of the rules. The principal has called home but is not using any progressive discipline. What can I do to ensure actions are taken to protect me and the rest of the class?

In addition to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act's* responsibilities for supervisors for the safety of workers, principals also have obligations under the *Education Act* for the safety of other students in the class/school.

Members should report such behavior to the school administration using the Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form. Check off the box that says "Any other activity for which a student may be suspended under board policy" or another applicable description that the school board has added. For each day this behaviour continues, a Safe Schools Incident Reporting Form should be submitted.

If enforcement is needed, contact the Ministry of Labour with a complaint indicating that the employer is not taking every reasonable precaution for the protection of workers. Members should contact their local ETFO local and/or health and safety representative for support.

With the colder weather, I can't keep my classroom window open as much or take my class outside as often. How can I determine if the ventilation in my classroom is adequate?

Odours and a feeling of stuffiness can be signs that ventilation rates are too low, which could cause headaches, fatigue or respiratory symptoms. Generally, people notice their symptoms after several hours at work and feel better after they have left the building or been away from it for a weekend or more.

If there is mechanical ventilation, confirm that air is flowing into the room from the air supply and return vents. Hold a piece of tissue paper near the air supply vent; if air is flowing, the tissue will flutter away from the supply vent and be pulled toward the return vent. Do not obstruct the airflow or place anything on top of unit ventilators. If the room has a radiator without a unit ventilator, the school board should provide a portable air filtration system.

Ventilation systems should be running before and after occupancy and windows can be used to increase the intake of fresh air if that does not interfere with a properly functioning HVAC system. Schools may have protocols for keeping one window in each room open slightly or opening windows when not occupied before and after school and during nutrition breaks.

Ask the principal for information about assessments or maintenance related to the ventilation, including the filters that are used. This information should have been provided to the Joint Health and Safety Committee. If a member has concerns about inadequate ventilation, report it to the principal as a hazard and request an investigation. Contact the health and safety representative for support if necessary.

We were provided with face shields in September that need to be replaced. The Ministry of Education’s guideline on requirements for their use is not clear nor has the principal provided specific information about cleaning and disinfecting. What are the rules and protocols?

School boards are to provide individual eye protection (face shield or goggles) to school board staff, including occasional teachers/temporary education workers. As per the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, when a worker cannot maintain physical distancing of at least two meters, eye protection must be worn both indoors and outdoors in addition to masks. Eye protection should be cleaned as per manufacturer’s instructions.

Face shields provided by the government are re-usable. Given that current products have a life-span of approximately two weeks, school board October orders were doubled and, subject to inventory on hand, school boards are to order two face shields per month for November onwards. The government is looking into procuring a more durable option. If no cleaning instructions are provided, Public Health Ontario advises to:

- Clean first the inside, then the outside, of the eye protection with mild detergent and rinse with clean water;
- Disinfect the outside of the eye protection with an alcohol swab or other disinfectant wipe;
- Rinse using clean water and allow to dry.

Members should report any concerns about personal protective equipment to the principal as a hazard, and contact their health and safety representative for support.

I teach in a Virtual School. Several students have been exempted from synchronous learning minutes for portions of the day. Caregivers are requesting that I record and post all of my synchronous lessons so students can watch them at their convenience. Am I obligated to record and post these videos online?

No. Members can use their understanding of their classroom and students, their professional knowledge and training to implement the curriculum in a meaningful way. Members should be prepared to provide rationale for the decisions they make, if asked.

Some members may find it helpful to record and post some lessons online as a part of their synchronous learning and online learning materials. For example, a teacher may decide to record a math lesson ahead of their synchronous lesson to then use that video as a part of their live lesson and post it to their online classroom. How they choose to teach and post work online is a [professional judgement](#) decision.

As part of PPM 164, parents/caregivers have the option to request an exemption from synchronous learning. Alternative learning approaches must be provided for all

exempted students. Examples include correspondence, print or broadcast media instruction. Exempted students must also be provided with a daily schedule or timetable in accordance with the 300-minute instructional day. Members should reach out to their administrator regarding obligations for providing work to students with exemptions.

If members choose to record synchronous lessons, they should be very cautious about recording students' images and voices, and ensure media release forms have been signed by each family. Videos should only be posted in a password-protected online classroom provided by the school board (i.e. Brightspace, Google Classroom) and any option to download should be disabled.

There are many online tools and digital resources I would like to use in my program. How do I know which tools are board “approved” and considered safe to use with students?

It is important to understand that school boards and educators must follow the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA)*.

This act outlines the rules and regulations for protecting student privacy and access to students' personal information. Boards use this guide to help develop a list of approved apps and services specific to the needs of each district. Using this approved list can protect a member from accidentally risking a student or family's privacy. Request a list of approved apps and services from your administrator and/or ask them questions about the use of online tools.

In addition, these two guides, [A Guide to Privacy and Access to Information in Ontario Schools](#) and [Privacy and Access to Information in Ontario Schools: A Guide for Educators](#), clearly describe how MFIPPA needs to be followed by educators and school boards. Of particular interest in the first guide referenced is the section entitled “Privacy in the Networked Classroom and the Use of Online Educational Services” (p. 30). Members can also review ETFO's [PRs Matters: Use of Electronic Technology in the Classroom](#).

What resources are available to support student mental health and well-being?

Mental health and well-being is of paramount concern for student success in school particularly given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students are not only dealing with their own anxieties; they may also be aware of the increased stress on their caregivers and have witnessed the pandemic's affect in their communities.

Easing student stress as they learn amid public health protocols requires educators to be mindful of the toll on student mental health. ETFO's [Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource](#) provides a number of strategies to support mentally healthy classrooms. For specific resources supporting conversations about anti-Black racism and vulnerable students, the [School Mental Health Ontario](#) website offers several including:

- [Supporting The Mental Health And Well-Being Of Students Who Will Return To School Remotely](#)
- [Supporting Mentally Healthy Conversations About Anti-Black Racism With Students](#)

I am a Kindergarten teacher and my administrator has asked me to report on students adjusting to health and safety routines as part of my Initial Observations report. I have other observations that I feel are more pertinent to share with their families. Must I report on adjustment to health and safety routines?

The Ministry of Education released a memo on October 2, 2020 with guidelines for the completion of the Elementary Progress Report Card and Kindergarten Initial Observations Report. The memo states, “For the 2020-21 school year, the Initial Observations *may* also describe the child’s transition to the new school year, including new health and safety measures.”

The Initial Observations report is meant to provide parents/caregivers with an *overview* of initial observations of their child’s learning and *early evidence* of growth in learning related to the overall expectations of the Kindergarten Program and with appropriate next steps to further the child’s learning. (Kindergarten Addendum, pg. 12)

Kindergarten teachers should rely on their professional judgement when determining the comments and may choose the most significant area of learning on which to focus.

How has COVID-19 continued to impact marginalized groups?

The pandemic has exposed and increased racial, gender and class inequalities in employment, healthcare, access to senior care, housing, access to justice and education. According to a Statistics Canada [Labour Force Survey](#) released in August, there have been unprecedented increases in unemployment due to the COVID-19 economic shutdown, and the impact falls most harshly on racialized communities.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has expanded its list of risk factors to include social and economic circumstances that increase risk for COVID-19 infection and severe outcomes. Social determinants of health (SDOH) are defined as factors beyond an individual’s biology and behaviours – those that form the conditions in which people are born, grow up, live and work. Public Health Ontario’s [COVID-19 – What We Know So Far About... Social Determinants of Health](#) provides further information.

COVID-19 has exposed and significantly increased pre-existing racial inequities in Canada. The Public Health Agency of Canada has recognized that sex/gender, Indigenous identity, homelessness, imprisonment and migrant and refugee status also severely worsen COVID-19 outcomes. Black and Indigenous communities are over-represented among Canadians with low socioeconomic status, a risk factor for increased risk of COVID-19. Studies in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom all show that COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting BIPOC communities.

The Colour of Poverty has released a [Reconstruction and Reset Plan for Canada](#) in order to address these gross racial inequities. It calls for a National Action Plan Against Racism that outlines concrete strategies such as employment equity measures and the necessary resource allocation for implementation.

What can I do to support households that experience food insecurity?

Prior to COVID-19, 13.3 per cent of households in Ontario reported food insecurity. In May 2020, 19.2 per cent of Canadian households with children had experienced food insecurity during the pandemic. As communities continue to respond to COVID-19, households experiencing food insecurity can find immediate support including [school meal programs](#), [food banks](#), and additional [community resources](#) across Ontario. These immediate responses to food insecurity need to be coupled with longer term anti-poverty strategies such as a [basic income program](#) and a [federal school food program](#).

For other information, please check ETFO's dedicated webpage at etfo.ca/link/covid19.