



March 9, 2022

## COVID-19 FAQ #7 – 2021-2022

In this COVID-19 FAQ, you will find information on: vaccination policies; health and safety; Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments; emergency remote learning; and the need for an equitable pandemic recovery.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **I've heard that the government is relaxing COVID-19 protocols. Will school boards be changing their vaccination policies and protocols, as well?**

Currently, school boards have the ability to make decisions about vaccination policies and protocols separate from government decisions. School boards will determine what, if any, changes they will make to their vaccination policies and protocols. ETFO will monitor any changes on an on-going basis.

#### **Can I continue to wear my mask after the mask mandate is lifted?**

Individuals should be able to wear masks in schools if they choose to do so.

On March 9, the provincial government announced that mask mandates would be lifted in Ontario elementary and secondary schools beginning March 21. This being said, local public health units can write orders with respect to communicable diseases, independent of the province's decision. School boards may also develop policies. Please seek advice from your local.

There are still a number of health and safety protections that are within a worker's control. This could include wearing the best available PPE, ensuring that stand-alone HEPA units are turned on, optimizing ventilation (e.g., by opening windows), verifying with your principal that the ventilation rate in your room has been checked, and discussing vaccination with your healthcare provider.

Workers in schools are protected by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, and employers have a responsibility to take every reasonable precaution to keep them safe. ETFO will always advocate for a safe workplace for our members.

## **How much longer will we be required to complete screeners before attending work?**

The government has not yet suggested that screening for workers or for students will be ending, but if and when they do, individual public health units or school boards may determine that it is still a reasonable precaution.

Joint Health and Safety Committees should be consulted in updating any safety precautions put in place by a school board. ETFO members who have concerns about the reduction in precautions can share them with their health and safety worker representatives or their local ETFO office. All workers are responsible for following the health and safety protocols developed by their employer.

## **What happens if I contract COVID-19 at work after the government has lifted public health restrictions?**

After public health restrictions have been lifted by the government, members who contract COVID-19 can continue to follow the steps that are in place to report their absence and access sick leave. If members believe they have contracted COVID-19 at work, they should be in contact with their health care provider and consider filing a Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) claim. For more information about claims and COVID-19, visit the WSIB's FAQs [here](#).

## **Has the Ministry of Education announced that EQAO will continue this year even though we are still coping with the pandemic?**

Despite repeated requests by ETFO to the Ministry of Education to pause EQAO for another year, students in Grade 3 and 6 who are attending school in person will participate in EQAO assessments this school year. The 2021-2022 EQAO administration window is from May 4 to June 24, 2022. Students who are learning remotely and wish to participate in EQAO assessments can, at the discretion of the school board. Remote learning students must participate in EQAO assessments in person.

ETFO continues to express concerns regarding the administration of EQAO this year and has launched a "Say No to EQAO" campaign on [Building Better Schools](#).

## **Is it true that the Ministry of Education announced virtual learning will continue for students in the 2022-2023 school year?**

Yes. On February 18, the Ministry of Education announced that all school boards are expected to implement emergency remote learning for the next school year. While ETFO supports a cautious approach to public health measures, especially for this school year, Premier Ford needs to answer why this government is not planning to get all students back to in-person learning in September.

ETFO firmly believes that in-person learning is the best, most equitable way for students to learn. Instead of extending the reach of online learning in our public schools, ETFO calls on the government to implement the systemic changes required to create safe learning environments inside all Ontario's schools, including smaller class sizes,

adequate supports for students and special education students in particular, ventilation improvements, and a commitment to in-person learning for all students.

Remote learning, implemented as an emergency measure during a global pandemic, should not be a continued option for the future. It does nothing but further exacerbate the inequities that exist across our province.

Read ETFO's media release [here](#).

### **What is an equitable pandemic recovery?**

The pandemic revealed the need for health equity and a just recovery. As restrictions continue to lift, the Canadian Medical Association Journal provides [13 recommendations](#) for an “equitable COVID-19 pandemic recovery” within the areas of income, housing, intimate partner violence, childhood, access to health care, and racism. These recommendations are intended for decision-makers at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels to address pre-existing social inequities that were further compounded by the pandemic. The urgency for public policy changes remains at the core of envisioning a recovery that leaves no one behind.

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