



December 1, 2021

COVID-19 FAQ #4 – 2021-2022

In this COVID-19 FAQ, you will find information on: vaccination; personal protective equipment (PPE); ventilation; safety plans; ETFO advocacy; and travel considerations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Should I be encouraging students to be vaccinated?

Members should not engage in discussions or advise students and/or their families on their personal/family choices related to vaccinations. This falls outside the realm of your required duties.

Are superior PPE options available?

Some boards are permitting workers to follow some of the advice in Health Canada's guidance, including:

- “double-masking” (fitted cloth mask over a medical mask);
- wearing a “mask fitter” (a plastic or silicone frame-like device that helps prevent leaks around the edge of a medical mask); and
- wearing their own Health Canada-approved respirator (e.g., N95s).

Workers who wear masks that exceed the current standards required by the province should make note of this recently updated advice from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC):

- Respirators (e.g., N95s) do not need to be formally fit-tested outside of certain occupational settings and purposes; and
- All medical masks and respirators sold in Canada are required to meet established standards.

How can I tell if the air exchange in my classroom is sufficient to keep me safe?

COVID-19 has brought a new awareness of ventilation issues. However, adequate air exchange has always been important. The backlog in maintenance, repair and improvements to ventilation systems means that there are many schools and classrooms with inadequate air exchange. Through [Building Better Schools](#), ETFO has

called for an improvement to the funding formula to make well-maintained schools possible.

The Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers has developed the [Classroom Ventilation Calculation Tool](#), which can generally assess the air exchange in a room by entering information such as its dimensions, occupancy, and details about its ventilation system and supplementary filters or fans, if any. All required information should be available to a worker who asks for it from the Custodian, Principal or Joint Health and Safety Committee, if necessary.

A better understanding of ventilation will help workers advocate for improvements, which is important both for safety and learning, even when there is no pandemic.

There have been days when occasional jobs for Teachers, DECEs and Educational Assistants have not been filled. When we are missing a member of our team, we don't have enough people, or enough trained people, to carry out the safety plans for some of our students. Is this allowed?

If a safety plan can't be followed because there aren't enough staff or workers who don't have the necessary training, then safety has been compromised for both workers and students. In this situation, it is the responsibility of the administrator to make the necessary adjustments:

- *Risk re-assessment:* After a serious incident or a change in situation – such as a change in staffing levels – a risk re-assessment must be conducted to plan for how to address any changes. This may require an update to the safety plan.
- *Safety plan update:* If the safety plan can't be carried out as written, it must be updated. There must be enough people with the correct training available to be called upon, if necessary.
- *Notification of risk:* Workers who may come into contact with a student whose behaviour could pose a safety risk, must be notified about that risk. This is usually done by sharing the safety plan (or a truncated safety plan with some information, such as diagnosis, removed for privacy).

As always, ETFO members who feel that they are not safe in the workplace should bring their concerns to their supervisor and be aware of their [right to refuse](#) unsafe work.

Is ETFO continuing to advocate for safe workplaces?

ETFO continues to call upon the government and school boards to take “every precaution reasonable” to make schools safe workplaces for ETFO members by:

- making asymptomatic tests available to all education workers and providing on-site testing in high-risk scenarios;
- continuing on-site confirmation of screening until it is no longer needed;
- introducing more stringent masking criteria for all students, including Kindergarten, that follows PHAC advice;
- ensuring real cohorting in schools so that student and worker contacts are limited to a single class whenever possible;

- making a significant effort to rapidly implement vaccination for children aged five to 11 ahead of the break, so that they are at least partially protected; and
- providing transparency about any assessments of ventilation, including carbon dioxide levels.

I am concerned that families will be travelling and gathering over the break and there won't be enough time for students to be fully vaccinated before they return in January. What precautions will be in place to prevent a post-holiday outbreak?

The Ministry of Education has provided an [update](#) to their guidance document, [COVID-19: Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for Schools \(2021-2022\)](#). The update, along with the Ministry of Health's winter testing [plans](#), are intended to keep schools open and to return to "normal school environments."

Precautions include:

- five rapid antigen tests being provided to each student in Ontario before the Winter Break – their use will be encouraged not required;
- on-site confirmation of screening for at least the first two weeks after returning from the break;
- virtual-only parent-teacher conferences and elementary school assemblies; and
- stricter cohorting during lunches and indoor breaks in elementary schools.

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 from their employer if they choose to travel and know (or ought to have known) that they will not be in a position to return to work as scheduled, owing to quarantine requirements.

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