

# COVID-19 FAQ #21 Responding to COVID-19

January 19, 2021

In this FAQ #21 update on COVID-19 related issues, you will find information on: COVID-19 exposure; child care; virtual classrooms; report cards; paid sick leave; student mental health; and international travel.

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

[View a version of COVID-19 FAQ #20.](#)

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

## Frequently Asked Questions

**I'm currently delivering in-person learning and have concerns about my safety. What can I do to address these?**

Carefully review the setup of your classroom and school board COVID-19 protocols to determine the specifics of your concerns. You may want to refer to this [Public Health Ontario checklist for schools](#) Consider the following:

- You have a duty to report all concerns and hazards to your principal; this should be your next step. Refer to ETFO's tip sheet for further information on [Your Rights and Your Employer's Duties](#).
- Take recommendations on how to improve safety to your principal, including:
  - higher grade PPE (such as, but not limited to level 3 masks, medical-grade goggles, medical-grade gowns) for all educators working in person;
  - enhanced and more frequent cleaning protocols for in-person classrooms;
  - carbon dioxide monitors for each classroom that is open at this time to alert staff to take actions such as enhancing ventilation by opening windows or informing maintenance staff to adjust ventilation settings;
  - portable air purification units in all in-person classrooms, even in classrooms with adequate ventilation on a temporary basis;
  - evidence of completion of a COVID-19 screener for every child learning in person presented to school personnel upon morning entry or prior to boarding the school bus; and
  - smaller class sizes for better physical distancing.
- Ask your principal for a risk assessment for your classroom to review space, ventilation, plexiglass, etc. This is an example of a [COVID-19 Risk Assessment for Schools Resource](#) from the Public Sector Health and Safety Association. If

possible, risk assessments should be done in collaboration with the Joint Health and Safety Committee.

If you returned to a special education classroom:

- review whether virtual learning is viable for particular students;
- review and update safety plans with the in-school team to maximize all of the layers of COVID-19 safety precautions, including crisis response;
- request increased staff-to-student ratios and ensure ratios of trained staff as indicated in safety plans are maintained; and
- review training specific to COVID-19 protocols in a special education setting to ensure everyone has been appropriately trained in the safety plan.

### **Who do I contact if my health and safety concerns are not addressed?**

If your concerns are not addressed, you could contact your local ETFO office, call in a complaint to the Ministry of Labour or, if you have “reason to believe” that conditions in the workplace are “likely to endanger” you, you have an individual right to refuse unsafe work. For information on the right to refuse unsafe work, refer to the [ETFO tip sheet Your Rights and Your Employer’s Duties](#) and ETFO’s COVID-19 FAQ #11 and #14.

Contact your local ETFO office and/or health and safety representative for assistance when dealing with unresolved health and safety concerns.

### **I teach in the north and am not sure why some schools are open for in-person learning and others throughout the province are not?**

The Ministry has indicated that the reason most northern schools remain open is due to low levels of COVID-19 cases and transmission within school buildings. The reopening of schools in the North was supported by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

A small number of northern schools have been closed based on the direction of local public health units. It is expected that the Chief Medical Officer of Health will advise the Ministry of Education on what other boards in Ontario may be permitted to resume in-person instruction, based on the most up-to-date data and modelling, by January 20.

You can find regional COVID-19 data on the [Public Health Ontario website](#).

### **What child care options are available for members during the current lockdown?**

ETFO continues to lobby the government to provide needed supports for families and educators. On January 6, ETFO President Sam Hammond sent a [letter to the Premier and Minister of Education](#). Child care access was specifically mentioned in this letter.

On January 9, the Ontario government announced [eligibility for Ontario's emergency child care program](#). Those eligible now include:

- A staff member of a school, as defined in the *Education Act*, who provides in-person instruction at a school to pupils with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning.
- A staff member of a school, as defined in the *Education Act*, who supports in-person instruction at a school to pupils with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning, such as instructional support, custodial, administration staff and other staff that ensure school settings are sanitary and safe for staff and students.

ETFO has been advocating for the expansion of access to other educators including those who are teaching virtually. The Ministry committed to looking into this and we await information.

Members assigned to work remotely while schools are closed for in-person instruction should contact their local to discuss available options if they have child care concerns. There may be leave entitlements in local collective agreements that could be accessed. In addition, members may be able to access an unpaid leave as an accommodation on the basis of family status. Members accessing an unpaid leave for child care may be eligible for federal government assistance through the [Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit](#).

Contact information for child care service system managers who manage child care services across the province can be found [here](#) and on websites maintained by your community or region. Eligible workers should contact approved child care operators directly for additional information.

### **How can I communicate virtual classroom rules and expectations to families?**

Check to see if your school board has guidelines for families that focus specifically on virtual learning. If your board does not have specific guidelines, many have an online code of conduct. It may be helpful to:

- Clearly communicate your expectations for a successful virtual learning classroom.
- Connect with other educators and your administration for ideas and consistency.
- Remind families that the virtual environment is a classroom and that all board and provincial policies and protocols are in effect. This includes teachers having authority over the classroom, subject content and classroom management.
- Consider communicating by email, parent/teacher conferences, poster/infographic, newsletter, video, and/or invitation to a virtual class meeting.

### **What should I consider sharing about family participation in virtual classrooms?**

In the same way you would for a physical classroom, it is important to share your rules and expectations for establishing a welcome, respectful, productive learning environment for both you and students. Information to consider sharing includes:

- expectations/routines for late students, absences, and submission of student work;

- how families can assist their child(ren) in navigating the online environment;
- protocol for communicating with you directly if there are any questions or concerns;
- clear privacy guidelines. Parents/guardians/caregivers should:
  - not join online classes or be visible on screens during classes;
  - avoid engaging with their child during classroom time;
  - not prompt or provide answers; students should complete tasks independently;
  - not video record, audio record, photograph or transmit in any other way any part of the virtual classroom or lesson;
  - not post any classroom images/video on social media platforms; and
  - be reminded that posted materials are intended for students only. Materials should not be copied or shared, including meeting links.

**How do I respond to a parent who regularly sits with their child during synchronous lessons, and responds for them?**

You may need to have a private conversation with them to remind them that the virtual environment is a classroom and that all board policies are in effect. You may need to explain, just like in a regular physical classroom, interruptions by other adults should not happen. Document each incident and your interactions with them. When speaking with them:

- Respectfully acknowledge that this is a new learning experience for everyone and remind them of the established class norms and virtual learning guidelines.
- Explain their significant role in supporting their child(ren)'s learning and what that role looks like in the virtual setting.
- Explain, as well, that you need to be able to assess the child's learning and progress, and that they may be interfering with your ability to accurately assess their child.
- Speak to your administration and request their support/guidance; keep them informed.
- If the behaviour continues, request an additional meeting with them and ask for an administrator to be present.
- Work with your administrator to determine strategies and next steps if it persists.
- Direct families to the Ministry of Education's policy guideline entitled [Growing Success](#), which references teachers' professional judgement as driving assessment.

If necessary, you can customize the technology features, e.g., mute/unmute for a brief time to prevent other adults from interrupting.

A helpful resource to share with families may be [ETFO's Professional Learning Matters pamphlet](#). Additional professional judgement resources can be found on the [ETFO website](#).

**It seems that I am being asked to communicate with parents on demand, all throughout the day. How do I set expectations and limits?**

Parent-teacher communication is an important part of student well-being and success. Here are some effective strategies that will support optimal communication:

- Determine your preferred process for communicating with families.
- Post and share this process in a variety of places and update it as required.

- Be consistent in your communication and responses to families.
- Discourage parents/guardians/caregivers from sending questions to you through students. Remind them of your preferred communication process for inquiries.
- Remind them that you work directly with students during the school day and that you will respond when you are available.
- Consider linking an FAQ in your email signature to reduce repeated emails.

### **What should I keep in mind when preparing for Term 1 Report Cards and Kindergarten Communication of Learning?**

The Ministry has indicated that they will release their guidance on reporting sometime this week. ETFO continues to make clear with the Ministry of Education that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to impact teaching, assessment and evaluation practices. To that end, challenges that occurred regarding the completion of 2020 Progress Report/Initial Observations are continuing for the Term 1 Report Cards and the Kindergarten Communication of Learning. Challenges include the collection of limited student evidence and validity of the evidence collected during distance learning.

For end of Term 1 reporting, teachers should use their professional judgement to:

- determine how best to evaluate and summarize student evidence for reporting purposes;
- determine grades/ratings; and
- determine the depth and breadth of comments.

Teachers are expected to have assessment data in their record keeping that substantiates the grades, ratings and comments they use for reporting.

As school boards may have unique reporting requirements, members should seek further direction from their local ETFO office regarding how to complete Term 1 Report Cards/Kindergarten Communication of Learning.

For further information, refer to the *ETFO Professional Judgement Guidelines for the Completion of the Elementary Provincial Report Card – Grades 1 to 8* and *Guidelines for Completion of the Kindergarten Communication of Learning Report*. Both are found [here](#).

### **I'm used to reporting on several strands in Mathematics. Now that only one mark is required, how do I determine that mark for the Term 1 Report Card?**

Determining one mark for Mathematics is new for all grade 1 to 8 teachers. ETFO continues to strongly advocate to the Ministry of Education for further resource development and professional learning opportunities to support the implementation of the revised Mathematics curriculum, including changes in evaluation and reporting practices.

Teachers should use their professional judgement to determine how best to evaluate and summarize student evidence for reporting purposes. Due to the pandemic, teachers may

have collected less evidence for evaluation than usual. As each local may have unique reporting requirements, members should seek further direction from their local ETFO office on how to complete the Mathematics section of the Term 1 Report Card.

The following suggestions support teachers' professional judgement when determining a single Mathematics report card mark:

- Make a judgement using student evidence for evaluation that aligns with key learning goals and success criteria that have been taught.
- If you have not yet fully integrated math concepts/strands into your planning, use the evidence for evaluation you have.
- Consider what "weight" the specific strands of Mathematics have in relation to the tasks or units you have taught.
- Use most recent and consistent evidence for evaluation across the term.
- Use the achievement chart and overall curriculum expectations to anchor decisions.

### **How do I write Mathematics comments that describe learning across the strands taught during the reporting period?**

Teachers should use their professional judgement to determine the length and focus of Mathematics comments. Some suggestions include:

- Determine student strengths and next steps based on what strands/skills or processes a student has demonstrated in relation to what you have taught.
- Consider using language that makes connections to skills/big ideas across strands.
- If you have not yet fully integrated math concepts/strands into your planning and program delivery, use the evidence for evaluation that you have on record to structure your comments.

### **How does access to paid sick leave for all workers keep communities safe?**

The spike in COVID-19 infections makes paid sick leave urgently needed. For months, public health experts have been recommending the implementation of paid sick leave.

Sixty per cent of Ontarians do not have access to paid sick leave, and for those in low-income jobs, those numbers increase, with more than 70 per cent being women. This leaves these workers at higher risk of contracting the virus and spreading it within their communities. As Black, Indigenous and people of colour are over-represented in precarious and low-income jobs, women from these groups are extremely vulnerable.

On December 8, NDP MPP Peggy Sattler introduced the "Stay Home If You Are Sick Act," which would guarantee 10 personal emergency leave (PEL) days per year for every worker, seven of which are paid. It would also mandate an additional 14 days of paid leave during any infectious disease emergency.

Without paid sick leave, workers will inevitably come to work with symptoms, which puts their co-workers and the people they interact with at risk. People should not have to decide between providing for their families and keeping them safe.

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

As educators and students move into the second school closure, mental health and well-being is a paramount concern. Students have not been immune, often not only dealing with their own anxieties, but also being aware of the increased stress on their caregivers, and in having witnessed it in their communities.

Easing student stress as they learn amidst new public health protocols and current lockdown measures requires educators to be mindful. ETFO's [Everyday Mental Health Classroom Resource](#) provides a number of strategies to support mentally healthy classrooms. Other resources include:

- School Mental Health Ontario
  - [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](#)
- Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
  - [“How do I talk about racism with my students and/or children?”](#)
  - [Family Tip Sheet-Covid 19](#)
  - [Helping your child thrive during virtual or in-person school](#)
- [Storyline Online](#)
- Use [211 Ontario](#) to find mental health services in your community
- Help and Crisis Lines:
  - Black Youth Mental Health Line: <https://blackyouth.ca/>
  - LGBT Youth Line: <https://www.youthline.ca/>
  - Support for Indigenous Peoples: <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/>
  - Kids Help Phone: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

### **I have recently travelled internationally, must quarantine for 14 days and cannot attend work. Am I able to access federal benefits?**

The three Canada Recovery Benefits (Canada Recovery Benefit, Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit and Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit) were intended to provide income support to eligible workers who are unable to work for COVID-19-related reasons. They were not intended to be used by Canadians who travel internationally and are then required to quarantine.

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