

March 10, 2022

Dear Burkevale Families and Staff,

Yesterday, the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) announced the lifting of a number of health and safety measures related to COVID-19 which has a direct effect on schools for the remainder of the 2021-2022 school year.

The following changes that affect schools/school boards are being shared with you.

**Effective March 21, 2022 (FOR STUDENTS, STAFF AND VISITORS):**

*Masking & Staff Personal Protective Equipment*

In alignment with community masking requirements, masks will no longer be required for students, staff and visitors in schools, school board offices and on student transportation. Eye protection for staff will also no longer be required.

As some students and staff may choose to continue to wear masks or eye protection, the government will continue to provide free masks and eye protection.

Students and staff may choose to continue to wear masks at times, or consistently for the remainder of the school year. This is an individual choice. We know that everyone will have their own comfort level when it comes to whether or not to wear masks, and as such, we will be communicating to our students, staff and families to be respectful, welcoming and inclusive to all individuals who are present at our school.

A reminder that under [current federal travel requirements](#), upon return from international travel, individuals must, wear a mask at all times when in public spaces (including schools and child care), maintain a list of all close contacts for your first 14 days in Canada, and monitor yourself for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

*Lifting of Cohorting and Distancing*

Cohorting and distancing will no longer be required in schools. Elementary students can play and learn together across cohorts, classes and grades, both indoors and outdoors and during lunch and recess, however, due to yard limitations at Burkevale, some outside cohorting will remain. For a number of reasons beyond cohorting, we will continue to assign seating on student transportation. Shared spaces, such as libraries, tech labs, and music rooms can be fully utilized without distancing. Programs across grades, such as reading buddies, can return. Limitations on in-person gatherings and assemblies will also be removed; therefore, schools can plan and host in-person events (e.g., proms, graduation ceremonies, and assemblies).

With the lifting of cohorting and distancing, we will no longer require the school to be closed as a result of bus cancellations. Moving forward, if buses are cancelled, Burkevale will remain open

for students and staff. If weather conditions require a full school closure, families will be notified accordingly.

### *On-site Confirmation of Screening*

Daily on-site confirmation of screening for all students and staff will no longer be required. **Staff and students should continue to self-screen every day before attending school using either the [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#), or a screening tool designated by the local public health unit.** The screening tool has been updated to align with the updated [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#).

Local public health units may designate a commensurate or more restrictive screening tool for local use.

## **Remaining Health and Safety Measures in Schools for the 2021-22 School Year**

### *Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette*

Appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette will continue to be promoted and integrated throughout the school day.

### *Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfecting*

Schools and school vehicles will continue with enhanced cleaning protocols in place. Required critical supplies and equipment, for example, disinfectant, will continue to be provided to school boards through the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services and the government's pandemic supply chain.

### *Ventilation Measures*

Burkevale continues to utilize standalone hepa filters in required classrooms and ensure the ventilation system is monitored and in-serviced on a regular basis.

### *Absence Reporting*

To continue ongoing monitoring of COVID-19 impacts, schools will continue to report absenteeism rates to public health units should they rise to a defined level (approximately 30% above their baseline). School boards will continue to report daily on absenteeism and closures through the absence reporting tool for posting on [Ontario.ca](#) until April 14, 2022. The ministry is reviewing and monitoring absenteeism and will determine whether the collection and posting of information on [Ontario.ca](#) will extend beyond this timeline.

## *Sickness*

As a reminder, **anyone who is sick or has any new or worsening symptoms of illness should stay home until their symptoms are improving for 24 hours** (or 48 hours for nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea) and should seek assessment from their health care provider if needed.

## **COVID-19 Testing Strategy for Ontario Schools**

### *Rapid Antigen Tests*

As you are aware, the ministry has made rapid antigen tests (RATs) available to school boards on a bi-weekly basis. This allocation was based on providing 2 tests per student/staff at 30% of total enrolment/staff headcount for schools and child care centres.

Bi-weekly shipments of RATs will continue to support **symptomatic testing only** for staff, students and children. Burkevale will continue distributing RATs to staff and students who return from an unplanned absence.

As a reminder, staff and students can also access RATs via participating community locations. Please see <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/rapid-test-locator> for specific locations.

### *Vaccination*

The government continues to promote COVID-19 vaccination for students, families and staff as the best defense against COVID-19, including the Omicron variant.

## **Updated Case and Contact Management Guidance**

Further to the updates mentioned above, the Ministry of Health has revised the [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#), with updated guidance for close contacts in the community and in households:

- Asymptomatic individuals who are close contacts of a case or a symptomatic individual in the community are no longer required to isolate but must self-monitor for 10 days following last exposure. During the self-monitoring period, close contacts must wear a well-fitted mask in all public settings, including schools, and avoid activities where they need to take off their mask (for example, playing a wind instrument in music class or playing high-contact sports).
- Asymptomatic household contacts of a case or a symptomatic individual are also not required to isolate if they are 17 or younger and [fully vaccinated](#); 18 and older and have already received their COVID-19 booster; or tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 90 days and have completed their isolation period. Asymptomatic household contacts who are not required to isolate are also required to self-monitor for 10 days following last exposure, as outlined above. **Children under 5 who are asymptomatic household contacts are required to isolate for 5 days.**

The [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#) has been updated to align with the recent changes made to federal travel requirements.

As with any decision, and particularly ones that impact our children, there will be many differing views. As a school/board our priority is to keep all of our students and staff safe within the parameters that are provided through the government and health units. Please know that as we move back to a more normal learning environment, we will do so keeping in mind the well-being of all of our students and staff. Please do not hesitate to contact the board office or the school should you have any questions related to the lifting of the listed health and safety measures.

We wish you and your family a restful and enjoyable March Break.

Sincerely,

Tim Overholt  
Supervisory Officer