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Subject: Ontario Extends Teacher-Led Online Learning Until January 25 to Keep Students and Staff Safe in Southern Ontario



Newsroom

News Release

Ontario Extends Teacher-Led Online Learning Until January 25 to Keep Students and Staff Safe in Southern Ontario

January 7, 2021

Province Also Extends Provincewide Shutdown in Northern Ontario

TORONTO — As COVID-19 cases continue to rise at an alarming rate throughout the province, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and other health experts, is extending certain measures to keep students, education staff, and residents of Northern Ontario safe. This includes extending in-person learning until January 25, 2021 for elementary school students in the 27 Southern Ontario public health unit regions and extending the shutdown in Northern Ontario for another 14 days, aligning with the shutdown period in Southern Ontario.

These time-limited measures are being taken to help ensure that all Ontarians stay at home as much as possible to minimize transmission of the virus and prevent hospitals from becoming overwhelmed, while at the same time being responsive to the fact that Northern Ontario students are not able to learn at home as effectively due to limited access to reliable Internet service.

"With the public health trends where they are across the province, our priority remains keeping students, teachers, school staff, and all Ontarians safe," said Premier Ford. "That's why we're extending the remote learning period for students in Southern Ontario and the shutdown period for Northern Ontario, while continuing to provide financial relief for parents through the Support for Learners program as well as electricity rate relief for all time-of-use customers. We have to get the numbers down and today's measures will help us continue to stop the spread of this deadly virus."

Targeted testing done among students and staff in December 2020 confirmed that schools are not a significant source of transmission. However, with students having been at home for several weeks and with reports of concerning behaviour over the holidays, the positivity rate among school-aged children has increased sharply. Most troubling, the positivity rate for kids aged 12-13 years old increased from 5.44 per cent in late November, early December to nearly 20 per cent in early January.

In response to increasing community transmission, in-person learning will be deferred to January 25, 2021 in

Southern Ontario, which aligns with the planned return of in-person learning for secondary school students in these regions. Elementary students and secondary students in the seven Northern Ontario public health unit regions will proceed with returning to in-person learning on January 11, 2021.

Returning students to school now with community transmission and positivity rates so high risks losing the hard-fought progress made in keeping schools and students safe. The Ministry of Education will continue to act on the best advice of medical and health experts to ensure that students in Northern Ontario are able to return to school safely and, when safe to do so, students in Southern Ontario as well.

The government's comprehensive plan of more than \$1.3 billion to protect students and promote safe learning environments will continue to be in place to support students and staff. The plan includes investments in personal protective equipment, improved ventilation, money to support the hiring of additional staff, and the introduction of asymptomatic testing to screen against COVID-19.

"I have and remain firmly committed to getting students back into class as soon as possible - there is nothing more important. However, the best medical and scientific experts have been clear: while schools have been safe places for kids, the sharp rise in community transmission puts that progress and Ontario families at risk," said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. "During this time, students will remain engaged in live teacher-led online learning with access to enhanced mental health and technology supports."

In the nearly two weeks since Ontario was moved into a [Provincewide Shutdown](#)

, trends in key public health indicators have continued to worsen in both Northern and Southern Ontario, including concerning trends in health system capacity, most notably in hospitals. Trends show increasing transmission in many Northern Ontario public health regions, with only one region showing a sustained low level of transmission. In addition, with the increased risk of transmission due to the confirmed presence of the COVID-19 UK variant in the province, the seven public health unit regions in Northern Ontario will remain in the shutdown until at least January 23, 2021. The impacts of these time-limited measures throughout the province will be evaluated after 14 days to determine if it is safe to lift any restrictions or if they need to be extended.

"In the last two weeks, we have seen concerning trends at home and abroad, as well as increased community transmission during the holidays, indicating that it is not yet the time to begin easing public health and workplace safety measures," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "While extending the shutdown in Northern Ontario is not the news many wanted to hear, we must work together to stop the spread of COVID-19, protect hospital capacity, and save lives."

The Chief Medical Officer of Health will continue to consult with experts, review data, and provide advice to government on the appropriate and effective measures that are needed to protect the health of Ontarians. This will include an assessment of how and when it is safe to exit the Provincewide Shutdown and move public health unit regions back into the *COVID-19 Response Framework: Keeping Ontario Safe and Open*, including how a revised approach for the safe reopening of retail may be operationalized.

"As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, it is crucial that all Ontarians continue to follow all public health and workplace safety measures," said Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health. "To help stop the spread of COVID-19 and safeguard health system capacity, Ontarians are strongly urged to stay at home, limit trips

outside of their households for essential reasons only and must not gather with individuals outside of the people they live with."

To support families during this extended school closure, child care centres, and home-based child care services will remain open. Ontario is also expanding eligibility for the Ministry of Education's targeted emergency child care program for a broader number of frontline health and safety workers.

In order to continue to support remote learning, the ministry has recommended that a portion of the second half of federal funding, an additional \$80 million investment, will be provided for additional technological devices, such as laptops and tablets, to support school boards in procuring about 160,000 additional devices province-wide.

Financial support is also available for families during this temporary remote learning period through the [Support for Learners](#) program. Starting on January 11, 2021, an expanded Support for Learners program is providing \$200 for each child or youth up to Grade 12 and \$250 for each child or youth up to age 21 with special needs. Applications will be open until February 8, 2021.

For those requiring additional support during this challenging period, Ontario is providing an additional \$10 million in support of student mental health, including funding for Kids Help Phone to support children and youth across the province. School Mental Health Ontario will be providing mental health resources and strategies to support students during this period.

QUICK FACTS

- Since the Provincewide Shutdown was implemented on December 26, 2020, Northern Ontario has seen an additional 3 hospitalizations for COVID-19, and an additional 9 hospitalizations since September 1 (at which time there were zero). During this period of time Northern Ontario has also seen 1 additional COVID-19 patient admitted to an intensive care unit (ICU) and has seen an additional 4 ICU admissions since September 1 (at which time there were zero).
- Northern Ontario currently has 9 COVID-19 patients requiring acute care, 4 patients in ICU, with 2 on a ventilator. Acute hospital occupancy (total patients) in Algoma Public Health and Public Health Sudbury & Districts are at over 90 per cent.
- Financial support is available for families during this temporary remote learning period through the Support for Learners program. Starting on January 11, 2021, an expanded Support for Learners program is providing \$200 for each child/youth up to grade 12 and \$250 for each child/youth up to age 21 with special needs. Applications will be open until February 8, 2021.
- Strict health and safety measures are in place for Ontario's childcare and early years settings to keep children safe – and ready to learn and thrive. These measures include daily screening, contact tracing, masks, eye protection, proper hand hygiene, physical distancing, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of

toys, equipment and centres.

- To support small businesses impacted by these necessary public health measures, the government introduced the new Ontario Small Business Support Grant, which will provide a minimum of \$10,000 and up to \$20,000 to eligible small business owners to help navigate this challenging period.
- In November, the government launched a program to provide rebates to offset fixed costs such as property tax and energy bills for businesses that are required to shut down or significantly restrict services due to provincial public health measures. These Property Tax and Energy Cost Rebates will continue to be available for businesses impacted by the Provincewide Shutdown and earlier restrictions. Business can apply for the rebates [here](#).
- If you have questions about what will be open or impacts to your business or employment, call the Stop the Spread Business Information Line at 1-888-444-3659.
- Get tested if you have symptoms compatible with COVID-19, or if you have been advised of exposure by your local public health unit or through the COVID Alert App. Visit [Ontario.ca/covidtest](https://ontario.ca/covidtest) to find the nearest testing location.
- To find the right supports, visit COVID-19: Support for People, which has information about the many available and free mental health services and supports.
- To stay safe, you can download the COVID Alert App free from the Apple and Google Play app stores.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Ontario Announces Provincewide Shutdown to Stop Spread of COVID-19 and Save Lives](#)
- [Ontario Launches Innovative Testing Program at Pearson Airport](#)
- [Ontario Building On Supports for Employers During COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19: provincewide shutdown](#)
- [Learn at Home](#)
- Visit Ontario's COVID-19 vaccine [web page](#) to view the latest provincial data and information on COVID-19 vaccines.
- Visit Ontario's [website](#) to learn more about how the province continues to protect the people of Ontario from COVID-19.

