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## Parent Update: COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

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Dear OCDSB Families,

We have been hearing your questions about COVID-19 and have assembled a list of questions and answers for you.

### **The number of cases**

At the time of writing, there were 68 active cases and 25 resolved cases. In most schools, we have seen single cases or multiple but unrelated cases. We have generally not seen the spread of the virus in school. This tells us that the safety measures we have put in place - daily self-assessment, physical distancing, hand hygiene, the wearing of masks and PPE as required, and the isolation of high-risk contacts in the event of a positive case, are helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

### **What is an outbreak?**

An outbreak is declared when there are two or more positive cases of COVID-19 which are directly linked through the school. When an outbreak or partial outbreak is declared it can lead to the closure of a class, a cohort or a school. At this time, there have only been two cases where Ottawa Public Health has declared a partial outbreak at OCDSB schools. In both cases, the closure period was five days or less and both cases are now resolved.

### **Dashboard reporting**

The OCDSB [COVID-19 Dashboard](#) provides a list of all confirmed cases of COVID-19 in schools. The Dashboard also lists when a class, cohort or school is ordered closed by Ottawa Public Health. We have recently modified the Dashboard to include both active and resolved cases. The Dashboard is updated daily, but it is not updated until the school community has been notified of a positive case. Depending on the timing of the notice, the Dashboard may be updated on the following day. Due to the differences in reporting requirements, there will almost always be slight

variances between the OCDSB dashboard, the provincial dashboard and the Ottawa Public Health reports.

### **What happens when someone tests positive?**

When an employee or a parent of a student notifies the school that they have tested positive, the principal contacts the public health nurse. The nurse verifies the positive result with Ottawa Public Health and then advises the principal if there is a confirmed positive case. Together they collect and review the contact tracing data and identify any high-risk contacts. Then, OPH prepares letters of notification for the community and for the high-risk contacts. These are sent by the principal. High-risk contacts also receive an automated phone call from OPH on days 1, 7 and 14.

### **How do you decide who is a high-risk contact?**

A high-risk contact means that you were in contact with someone with COVID-19 for longer than 15 minutes and/or closer than 2-metre distance, in the last 2 weeks. Ottawa Public Health identifies high-risk “close contacts” through a detailed review of factors such as the individual’s symptoms, where they have been, who they have interacted with, whether masks and/or PPE were in use. Interactions where people briefly come within 2 metres (6 feet) of each other, such as walking by someone in a hallway or on the sidewalk, are generally not considered “close contacts”.

### **If there is a positive case in my class will everyone be a high-risk contact?**

Not necessarily. Every case and every class is different. The public health nurse will work with the principal to determine what the possible exposure was. The first thing to consider is when the individual was most recently at school and whether they were infectious at that time. Then, they consider who was in attendance/absent during the exposure period, how the classroom was configured, whether students were wearing masks, what kind of learning activities were happening and the distance between individuals in the class. We also consider bus routes and other shared spaces. In some cases, all or most of the class has to self-isolate, in other cases, only a small number have to self-isolate.

### **How could there be a case in my school but no high-risk contacts?**

We have had several confirmed cases in schools with no high-risk contacts. Often this is because the individual who tested positive did not attend school during the period of transmission. That’s why it is important to stay home if you have any symptoms or known exposure.

### **Why does the self-isolation period vary?**

The self-isolation period is always the same - individuals with a confirmed positive test must self-isolate for 10 days and high-risk contacts must self-isolate for 14 days. However, the days are counted from the point of exposure, not the date the case is confirmed positive. That’s why some school letters require high-risk contacts to self-isolate for 14 days and some have shorter time periods. Each case is unique.

### **I’m worried about the lag time between when a person tests positive and the school community is notified**

When there is a positive case affecting a school, the most important step in reducing risk is to ensure the individual who tested positive is NOT at school. The next step is identifying the high-risk contacts. These people need to self-isolate as a precaution - they have not tested positive, but they should self-isolate and monitor for symptoms. So far, very few individuals who have been identified as high-risk contacts in an OCDSB school have tested positive for the virus.

The safety measures we have in place, including cohorting, mask wearing, hand washing and physical distancing, are all designed to work together to reduce the risk of exposure further. Daily screening for COVID-19 symptoms helps to reduce the chance of the virus coming into the school.

### **Why did I get a letter saying there is a case in my school and the dashboard says 0 cases?**

We update the dashboard daily, but not until we have notified the school community. Depending on the time of day, this might mean that some updates to the dashboard happen the next day.

**When is a case resolved?**

OPH advises when a case is resolved. Generally, this means that the period for self-isolation for the positive case and the close contacts has ended.

**My whole class was sent home to self-isolate but my class wasn't closed, why not?**

A class closure happens when OPH confirms there has been an outbreak or partial outbreak. This is different than when most, or, in some cases, all students in a class have to self-isolate because they are high-risk contacts. In most cases, we have had some or many in a class self-isolate, but not usually all of the students in the class.

**What happens if my child has to self-isolate?**

If your child has to self-isolate, they cannot come to school. But, they can still participate in learning. The principal and the teacher will explain how to engage in learning during self-isolation.

**Can you ensure that parents are notified of a positive case as soon as you become aware?**

We are doing everything we can to ensure that once a positive case has been confirmed by Ottawa Public Health, the school community is notified as quickly as possible. Over the past month, we have been working in partnership with OPH to refine the process and ensure parents get timely information.

We will post these to our website with other frequently asked questions and will continue to provide the most current information possible.

Please remember that daily self-assessments, staying home if you are symptomatic, wearing a mask, and proper hand hygiene are things that we can all do to help stop the spread.

Sincerely,

Camille Williams-Taylor  
Director of Education

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