

Common COVID-19 Occupational Health & Safety Concerns and Responses (2021-2022)

Revised January 17, 2022

Facility Services

Can Schools/Sites purchase portable air purifiers with a HEPA filter with MERV >13 rating?

TDSB has sourced through Provincial funding commercial HEPA Air Purifiers for schools use. Schools have received HEPA units (Austin, Jade and Danby) for all occupied classrooms and other areas as per the [Caring for High Efficiency Particulate Air Purifying \(HEPA\) Units and Use Guideline](#).

In January 2022 the Ministry of Education announced additional funding for the purchase of HEPA units.

The TDSB has exceeded the minimum requirement set out by the Ministry of Education regarding the placement of HEPA units to ensure that each operational classroom receives a unit.

School/Sites and parent community groups are not permitted to purchase portable air purifiers with HEPA filtration units. Units need to be properly sourced and meet the needs of the space. All units are assigned an asset number to be tracked and scheduled for routine maintenance.

Can HEPA Filter with a MERV >13 rating be installed in our Air Handling Units?

The large majority of ventilation systems in our schools do not have enough force, nor are they designed to use HEPA filters with a MERV >13 rating. HEPA filters are designed to be restrictive and may actually decrease the amount of fresh air coming into the school/site if they are installed directly in our air handling units. In schools/sites where MERV >13 rated filters can be utilized, Facility Services has sourced and supplied filters to those schools/sites.

What has the TDSB done to increase fresh air and ventilation?

The TDSB's maintenance department has conducted the following and will continue to service ventilations systems as required:

1. Air filters are changed prior to school/administrative sites reopening and every 2 months.
2. Where possible the fresh air ratio will be increased and not to be set to recycled or recirculated air.
3. If windows are present they may be opened to increase fresh air. Facility Services has reviewed ventilation and window systems for each school. Should there be any specific concerns with your immediate workspace(s) the caretaker can investigate and enter the appropriate notifications.
4. Building Automated System (BAS) to be scheduled to run 2 hours before and 2 hours after the start of the regular school hours to provide additional air exchanges.
5. Portable air purifiers with HEPA filters have been placed in schools in all occupied classrooms and other spaces depending if mechanical ventilation is available. In

March 2021 and January 2022, additional funding provided by the Province has allowed the TDSB to purchase additional HEPA units.

If I am concerned about indoor air quality in my school/site, how do I arrange for testing?

TDSB has an indoor air quality guideline (GU.FAC.094 Investigating Indoor Air Quality Concerns). The guideline is used to determine a variety of indoor air quality concerns (i.e. lack of airflow, mould, physical discomfort, chemicals). Principals are to work with the head caretaker and facilities to resolve concerns at the school. If there is no resolution to the concern then further investigation will be conducted by your Learning Centres OH&S Regional Officers and FTL.

Can a CO2 detector be installed in my workspace?

CO2 monitors are not required in classroom environments. Operational windows are to be opened, even during the winter months (especially during lunch breaks, when masks may be off), as frequently as possible, to increase fresh air. Outdoor masks breaks should be taken as necessary.

While Public Health Ontario notes "CO2 is not an indicator of COVID-19 transmission risk," high indoor CO2 can assist in identifying locations where there may be poor ventilation.

TDSB Facility Services have increased filtration to compensate. HEPA filtration will filter out bacteria and viruses, but will not affect CO2 levels. If a space was found to be poorly ventilated with HEPA filtration systems, the CO2 levels may be higher, but the airborne transmission risk is low because of the HEPA filtration.

Should there be any specific concerns with your immediate workspace(s) the caretaker can investigate and complete the appropriate notifications. If indoor air quality (IAQ) concerns are not resolved staff can request the Principal/Supervisor to initiate the [Investigation Indoor Air Quality \(IAQ\) Concerns Guideline](#).

Ventilation information for your school is available on the TDSB's public website titled [TDSB,s Ventilation Report](#). For ventilation details pertaining to your specific classroom and/or workspace staff are encouraged to discuss with their school Principal and Head Caretaker.

What if I don't have windows that open?

The Ontario Building Code allows for buildings to be constructed with windows that do not open. In schools where windows are not designed to open, the ventilation system is designed to compensate for this. Speak with your Facilities Services staff if you believe a set of windows should be operational.

Can a portable fan be used in the school?

Portable fans are permitted, however fans must be set at the lowest setting and directed upward.

When is plexiglass recommended?

Plexiglass barriers only offer one method of providing a barrier when physical distancing of 2 metres or greater cannot be achieved. Staff should work with their administrators to assess the workspace and implement proper physical distancing measures. Plexiglass does not eliminate the need for the use of personal protective equipment. Strategies to achieve physical separation may include, but are not limited to:

- Arrange work schedules to minimize workers that are required to be a designated area at one time, or work remotely.
- Repurpose office furniture to create physical barriers
- Utilize signage or floor decals to direct foot traffic

Principals/Site Supervisors must contact their FTL for assistance in determining if plexiglass is required and to place an order. Should there be a unique situation the OH&S Officers can be contacted to offer additional support.

Will schools be receiving portable acrylic barriers?

The TDSB has provided all schools with one prefabricated portable piece of plexiglass to be used at a location of their choosing. This is being provided for public facing areas where other public health measures cannot be implemented. Toronto Public Health does not recommend barriers in the classroom (i.e. students desks).

COVID-19 and Staff

I am concerned that my current work environment will harm my mental health. What resources are available through the TDSB?

Mental health support and resources are available through the TDSB [Mental Health and Well-Being \(tdsb.on.ca\)](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/mental-health) and the Employees Assistance Program (EAP). The City of Toronto has a dedicated mental health number for help 2-1-1, as well as Toronto Public Health.

Will the TDSB develop a rapid antigen testing program for staff and students who return to in-person learning.

Schools continue to work with community partners such as TPH and partnering hospitals to provide opportunities for testing for both staff and students. PCR test kits are available at schools for symptomatic staff and students.

The Ministry of Education has committed to providing 2 rapid antigen testing kits for staff and students on January 17, 2022.

If you are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms do you have to get tested?

If you suspect that you have COVID-19 symptoms you must stay home and self-isolate, if possible complete a PCR or Rapid Antigen Test kit. If you cannot access a COVID-19 test, you are to follow public health guidance and continue to self-isolate. Do not come to school or work.

For more information on how to get tested, visit the [Toronto Public Health](#) website.

For those who test positive, will a negative test result be required in order to return to work?

Individuals with a confirmed case of COVID-19 can return to work 5 days if fully vaccinated or 11 days if not fully vaccinated, after their symptoms have improved for 24 hours or 48 hours (if gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms) . No tests or clearance letter is required for return to work or school.

What if it was not COVID-19, how do you return to work?

If an alternative diagnosis has been provided by a medical physician or nurse practitioner

How do I report COVID-19 as an occupational illness?

If staff believe they have contracted COVID-19 in the workplace , the staff member must complete the Employee's Report of Accident/Injury.

I have contracted COVID-19 from the workplace, how do I report to WSIB?

Complete and fax in the Employee's Report of Accident/Injury form to the Disability Claims Administration Office. Upon receipt they will produce the necessary paperwork and report to the WSIB.

Administrative Controls and Procedures

What strategies are in place to ensure classes remain in their cohorts, if there are staff absences that cannot be filled? In what situations would combining class cohorts be permitted?

The TDSB is using all available resources to ensure that staff absences are filled. This includes increasing the number of days that a retired teacher can work and permitting second year teacher students to fill teacher absences. In addition schools have the experience and technology in place to pivot to remote learning if necessary. The TDSB is only supporting the practice of combining cohorts in exceptional/emergency circumstances (e.g., illness during the day resulting in lack of staff). In those situations, we would ask that we not bring more than two cohorts together.

The Provincial government has required all School Boards to “ensure plans are in place to support students with special education needs to learn remotely. Boards will be required to make provisions for in-school supervision or learning for students with extraordinary special education needs.” How is the TDSB ensuring these provisions are in place?

A similar process was undertaken with staff and families when schools were last instructed to pivot to remote learning. Directive has been provided to school administrators from the Special Education Department on how to best support students. Administrators were asked to engage in collaborative discussion with families and staff who work directly with students around which students with complex special education needs may require in-person

accommodation for the period January 5th to at least January 17th. In addition to providing PPE and following current H&S protocols.

Due to recent Ministry Reopening Guidance (Jan 2022), will the TDSB continue to inform staff of COVID-19 positive cases in my school?

TDSB will be reviewing the Operational Guidelines COVID-19 Case Management Plan. The TDSB will continue to adopt guidance provided by the Ministry of Education and Toronto Public Health. TDSB will continue to request school administrators and supervisors to report known positive cases (RAT or PRC).

I work with students who do not/cannot wear masks regularly/consistently. What is the TDSB doing?

As staff work with students who are only required to wear a non-medical or cloth mask, staff have been issued personal protective equipment. Staff are to wear at a minimum a medical mask level 1. Should a higher level of protection be available the staff may select to wear a higher-level mask (i.e. medical mask level 2 or N95). Staff who work within 2 metres/6 feet to staff and/or students must wear a face shield or goggles when physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Those students who can tolerate wearing a mask will be provided with a 3-layer cloth mask. 3 layer cloth masks are available at the school or can be ordered through the Distribution Centre. Students must complete the daily screening and stay home if unwell.

What to do if screening protocols are not being followed? What safety protocols are in place to support students that are nonverbal and are unable to communicate if they are symptomatic or feeling unwell? What is the TDSB doing to ensure my safety?

Screening protocols have been developed and continue to be in place since the start of COVID-19. The TDSB has implemented screening protocols, stations and daily health assessments to be completed daily prior to leaving for work/school, either using the Daily Health Screening App/Portal or paper pass.

Screening posters, symptoms and questions have been updated by TPH as of January 10, 2022 for staff and students and will be communicated to the system. The Special Education Department has developed resources to support staff working with students who are nonverbal.

If you have concerns regarding the screening protocols, speak with your immediate supervisor/principal. If concerns remain unresolved, staff may complete the OH&S

Concern/Near Miss form or contact Occupational Health and Safety Department or your JHSC worker member.

Has there been a risk assessment in our school; and/or a re-evaluation of the risk assessment based on the current Omicron COVID-19 variant which is known to be airborne and highly transmissible?

There is no requirement for the TDSB to conduct a separate and independent risk assessment. The Ministry of Education, Public Health Ontario and Toronto Public Health have developed and revised reopening guidance and safety protocols due to the increase in positive case numbers and the variant of concern. TDSB continues to revise and develop [operational guidelines](#) as it pertains to COVID-19 and potential hazards, based on public health guidance.

Will student safety plans be reviewed in light of the highly transmissible Omicron variant, and in the event of staffing level shortages? Special Education Department and Professional Support Services are available to school staff through the Principal, should there be concerns with the effectiveness of the student safety plan.

The Ministry of Education has announced that retired teachers can now work up to 95 days (up from 50 days), and second year teaching students may be employed in certain circumstances.

What is the criteria to decide who can visit a school/site?

The Board is strongly discouraging visitors. It will be the responsibility of the Principal/Site Supervisor to make a decision on who can enter the school/site. Any visitor requiring entry to the school will need to prearrange with the Principal/Site Supervisor and be screened at designated entrances.

What is the limit for visitors/volunteers in the school?

This will be at the discretion of the Principal but we are discouraging visitors/volunteers at this time. Official City agencies such as fire department, inspector, JHSC inspector, authorized Board personnel are permitted. They must follow all screening protocols and wear medical masks.

Are volunteers allowed into schools/sites?

This will be at the discretion of the Principal but we are discouraging volunteers at this time.

When signing in, will staff/visitors be using the same pen?

Hand sanitizer is available at entry points in order to assist with proper hand hygiene, if one does not have their own pen. Hands should be sanitized before and after using the pen.

How will shared equipment in shared spaces be cleaned and disinfected?

Staff are highly recommended to practice hand hygiene before and after use. Disinfecting wipes will be available to departments for cleaning and disinfecting of equipment before and after use.

Can schools/sites use small appliances?

OH&S does not recommend the use of small appliances (i.e. microwaves, and kettles) during COVID-19, as outlined in the Ministry of Education's Guide to Reopening. If small appliances, which have high touch surfaces, must be used the precautions listed below must be implemented:

- Avoiding gathering while waiting around the appliance
- Washing hands before and after use
- Wiping down high touch surfaces after use (consider leaving wipes nearby)
- Posting signage with these measures as a reminder to staff

Small appliances in the classroom are not permitted as per the [TDSB's housekeeping memo](#).

At recess, can students take their masks off with their cohort?

Schools are encouraged to hold outdoor recess/lunch and mask breaks when possible. School Administrators are to schedule recess/lunch/mask breaks to minimize the number and interaction between cohorts. Students are not required to wear masks while within their cohorts. Physical distancing should be encouraged within the cohort. If cohorts cannot maintain physical distance from another cohort, masks should be worn while outdoors.

If students/staff are having a mask break, which may include recess and lunch, physical distancing must be maintained. Staff on yard duty will continue to monitor students and remind students of proper distancing protocols as necessary.

How many students/staff are allowed in washrooms? What is the direction around this?

The Principal/Site Supervisor will need to assess the capacity of each washroom space and indicate this number on the washroom poster (available through the Distribution Centre). Principals should consider assigning specific washrooms for use.

How many students/staff are allowed on elevators?

The Principal/Site Supervisor will need to assess the capacity of each elevator and indicate this number on the elevator etiquette poster (available through the Distribution Centre). For students with accessibility needs please consider an appropriate entry protocol to best suit their needs.

Are bottle filling stations allowed for use?

Yes, bottle filling stations are permitted, if available. Students and staff are encouraged to bring their own supply as drinking fountains may not be accessible. Bottle filling stations will be cleaned twice daily as per the TDSB enhanced cleaning schedule. Staff/students should practice hand hygiene when using bottle refilling stations.

How do TDSB staff report ongoing health and safety concerns?

When staff's health and safety concerns are unresolved or if the response from a supervisor does not resolve your concern, an Occupational Health and Safety Concern/Near Miss form can be completed.

What can I do, if I cannot ensure a physical distance of 2 metres/6 feet in my classroom?

TDSB staff may work with the school Principal to determine if there is additional space in the school that could be utilized (i.e. staffroom, cafeteria, gym). If space is not available, other safety measures must be followed, such as;

- Staff/students to conduct their daily self-assessment prior to arriving to school/work
- Do not come to school/work ill
- Wear all personal protective equipment
- Practice respiratory and hand hygiene
- Don't touch your face

Personal Protective Equipment

Can I request an N95 face mask?

The TDSB standard for masking is the medical mask level 1. Currently the TDSB is providing medical masks level 2. These masks must be provided by the principal/supervisor and be readily accessible should they be soiled. Non-fitted N95 masks are available for optional use. The TDSB is working on resources to provide to staff on how to achieve a good fit. The key message is obtaining a good fit, whether using a medical mask or a non-fitted N95 masks. Workers will need to individually determine what mask provides the best fit. For more information on how to achieve a proper fit using a medical mask visit OH&S http://tdsbweb.tdsb.on.ca/es_health_safety/COVID-19-Information-Resources/COVID-19-Personal-Protective-Equipment

Will non-fit tested N95 masks be fitted?

The TDSB standard for masking is the medical mask level 1. Currently the TDSB is providing medical masks level 2. These masks must be provided by the principal/supervisor and be readily accessible should they be soiled. Non-fitted N95 masks are available for optional use. The TDSB has developed resources to provide staff instruction on how to achieve a good fit. The key message is obtaining a good fit, whether using a medical mask or a non-fitted N95 mask. Workers will need to individually determine what mask provides the best fit. For more information on how to achieve a proper fit using a medical mask visit OH&S http://tdsbweb.tdsb.on.ca/es_health_safety/COVID-19-Information-Resources/COVID-19-Personal-Protective-Equipment

What is the difference between a medical mask level 1, level 2 and level 3?

Medical/Surgical/Procedural masks are assigned levels 1-3, based on ASTM standards and testing, with level 1 being the lower level of protection and level 3 the highest. Levels are based on the level of risk and job task performed by the worker.

Level 3 masks are designed to resist a splash or spray during tasks like orthopedic surgery or trauma. In addition they are used when there is heavy aerosolation. ASTM rating 160 mm hg, 98% BFE, 98% PFE.

Level 2 masks are designed to resist a splash or spray at arterial pressure. ASTM rating 120 mm Hg, 98% BFE, 98% PFE.

Level 1 mask Designed to resist a splash or spray at venous pressure. ASTM rating 80 mm Hg, 95% BFE, 95% PFE.

*Bacterial Filtration Efficiency (BFE) and Particulate Filtration Efficiency (PFE)

How many masks will each staff member get per day and are they disposable or reusable?

The provincial government has provided 2 disposable medical masks and/or 1 non-fit tested N95 mask per day. Masks must be changed when damaged, soiled and/or difficult to breathe in. If additional medical masks are needed, please see your Principal/Site Supervisor.

Is double-masking recommended?

Double-masking refers to the practice of wearing two masks. Double-masking is not required, nor recommended at this time by Toronto Public Health. Medical masks must be worn directly on the face. If staff are to wear a cloth mask over top, they must ensure that the medical mask is donned first and ensure a proper fit. If Staff choose to double-mask they may place their own personal cloth mask on top of the medical mask. Proper hand hygiene must be practiced at all times when donning and doffing masks. Avoid touching your mask and face, to prevent contamination of the mask.

Can face shields be used multiple times?

All staff must receive a face shield upon arriving at work. This becomes their own piece of personal protective equipment that can be used multiple times. Staff are encouraged to clean and store their face shields in a sealable bag. Face shields may be replaced when damaged or difficult to see through.

How should a face shield be cleaned?

Face shields should be cleaned daily with soap and water and/or disinfectant wipes. Alcohol based sanitizer can be used if disinfectant wipes are unavailable.

Can students wear a face shield instead of a face mask?

No, a face shield is used for eye protection. Please see TDSB COVID-19 Mask Guideline. [Operational Procedure PR730.](#)

Can staff wear non-medical masks?

No, a level 1 medical mask is required to enter all TDSB sites. Exemptions for staff may be granted under special circumstances. Staff can discuss accommodations/exemptions with their Principal/Manager.

Can a staff member bring their own face masks?

No, staff are required to wear the Board provided medical mask while inside TDSB sites. Exemptions for staff may be granted on a case by case basis. Staff can discuss accommodations/exemptions with their Principal/Manager.

How many face shields are to be ordered per staff?

TDSB staff members will be provided with one reusable face shield. Face shields may be replaced when they become damaged and/or visibility is poor.

When must a staff member wear a face shield?

A face shield must be worn at all times when physical distancing cannot be predicted and/or maintained.

Where can we get additional personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff?

Additional PPE can be ordered through the Distribution Centre.

Where is personal protective equipment disposed?

All personal protective equipment (i.e. gloves, mask, gown etc.) shall be disposed of in a lined garbage receptacle.

Signage: Decals and Posters

Where can we get additional posters that were previously distributed?

Additional posters can be purchased through the Distribution Centre

Where can we get additional directional decals?

Additional decals can be purchased through SAP from Instant Imprints, contract #4600010936.

Toronto Public Health

Is COVID-19 related information available in multiple languages for school communities?

Resources are available to the community in multiple languages through TPH and other agencies that continue to support school communities in this capacity.

Currently there are some staff and students are not fully vaccinated. Can the TDSB mandate that all staff and students be fully vaccinated in order to attend work/school in person?

The TDSB has mandated that all staff be fully vaccinated in order to attend work. Those that cannot be fully vaccinated based on vaccine accommodations are required to complete rapid antigen testing 3 times per week. Students are not currently required under the Chief Officer of Medical Health to be fully vaccinated. Toronto Public Health is currently advocating for COVID-19 vaccination to be added to the student immunization vaccine list. TDSB does not have the jurisdiction to mandate that all students be vaccinated.

There is a lack of access to vaccine booster doses to ensure students have access to both doses.

Booster doses have been offered to all staff. The Ministry has recently announced the acceleration of booster doses for all Education Workers. TPH continues to provide clinics to

communities to provide opportunities for all students and community members to receive their 1st, 2nd and 3rd doses.

TDSB continues this ongoing work with TPH and hospital partners to reach out to our communities. TPH provides updates and information on [TPH vaccination clinics](#).

I am concerned about COVID-19 and new variants in my school/workplace. How do I request COVID-19 testing for the school?

School Administrators have been provided with PRC test kits that can be provided to staff and students who are symptomatic. Contact your School Administrator to inquire about additional testing options.

What if someone in our household is returning from international travel? Will I need to self-isolate for 14 days?

According to Toronto Public Health, any individual who has travelled outside of Canada and is not fully vaccinated must not attend work/school for 14 days upon their return. If the child/student is not fully vaccinated, they do not attend school/child care for 14 days. Travellers must follow all federal quarantine [travel rules](#).