

Sent via e-mail

March 15, 2022

Alexander Brown
Chair, Toronto District School Board
5050 Yonge Street
Toronto, ON M2N 5N8

Dear Mr. Brown:

Re: Update on COVID-19 Protocols (March 11, 2022 Letter)

Thank you for your letter and the continued interest of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) in supporting the health of your students.

While the overall policy direction for schools is provided by the Province, Toronto Public Health (TPH) has worked closely throughout the pandemic with the TDSB to provide recommendations and guidance that are evidence-informed and timely, to keep schools as safe as possible. Additionally, TPH and our Team Toronto vaccination partners have successfully collaborated with TDSB to offer hundreds of COVID-19 vaccination clinics at school sites for staff, students and their families. The remarkable work of school administration and staff to support these clinics during school hours and after hours has contributed to the high rates of COVID-19 vaccine coverage in our community, with first dose vaccination rates approaching 60% for 5-11 year-olds and 94% for 12-17 year-olds. This is a testament to the incredible partnership with Toronto schools to ensure that vaccination, the most effective measure to combat COVID-19, is available to those in school settings.

As you are aware, all policies related to mask mandates in schools are within the provincial government's purview. Further, with the most recent update to the Reopening Ontario Act, local medical officers of health are precluded from issuing Letters of Instruction to implement local measures, including the requirement that masks be worn in schools or other locations.

Even in the absence of regulations requiring their use, masks continue to be an important part of our community's COVID response. The use of well-fitting, high-quality masks is an important measure we can still use to protect our health alongside vaccination, staying home when sick, screening and other protective measures. We encourage the Toronto District School Board to ensure that their schools are mask-friendly places, which enable those who choose to wear a mask to do so, including continuing to provide mask breaks for those staff and students, during the school day. As has been the case throughout the pandemic, the team here at Toronto

Public Health stands prepared to support the Toronto District School Board and all its schools in this regard.

We also recognize that based on the potential for the emergence of new variants and the spread of COVID-19, and as stated by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, there may be a time in the future when the Province reinstates mask mandates. As such, my team and I will continue to work with the Province and the Chief Medical Officer of Health to closely monitor the key public health and health care system indicators and work closely with you and your team at the TDSB.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "E. de Villa".

Eileen de Villa, MD, MBA, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

cc. Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health