ADVISORY

SUBJECT:	**Healthcare provider guidance for COVID-19 testing for children**
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Pages:	3
To:	Physicians, Hospital Emergency Departments, Primary Care Providers, Assessment Centres
From:	Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

WDG Public Health appreciates the continued support of our local healthcare providers in the fight against COVID-19. As schools reopen across Ontario, it is important to remember that there is ongoing spread of COVID-19 in our communities and children across all age groups are susceptible to infection.

Children tend to have milder infections than adults and may not present with typical COVID-19 symptoms. The most common symptoms in children with COVID-19 include cough, fever, sore throat, diarrhea, difficulty breathing, vomiting, nasal congestion, and abdominal pain. Evidence to date suggests that approximately 1-10 percent of COVID-19 cases are in children, with a substantial portion being asymptomatic.[1]

COVID-19 must be considered as a potential diagnosis for <u>anyone</u> presenting with symptoms of acute respiratory infection, regardless of exposure risk due to travel or close contacts.

Healthcare Provider Role in Recommending Testing for Children

- A healthcare provider must use the current provincial testing guidance and their clinical judgement to determine if a child needs to be tested for COVID-19. There are no validated clinical tools available to differentiate COVID-19 from other illnesses with similar symptoms.

- WDG Public Health strongly recommends that anyone presenting with <u>at least one</u> symptom of COVID-19, and no known alternative diagnosis, be considered for PCR testing.[2] (Please refer to the most recent *COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms.*[3])

- Testing children without symptoms is not recommended, except in prescribed situations such as:

  o The child is considered a high-risk, close contact of a COVID-19 case.
  o The child is linked to a COVID-19 outbreak.
  o As otherwise recommended by provincial testing guidance.

- WDG Public Health's Case and Contact Management Team identifies and counsels high-risk contacts on self-isolation requirements and testing recommendations.

- More information about testing can be found in the Ministry of Health's *COVID-19 Quick Reference Public Health Guidance on Testing and Clearance.*[4]

Self-assessment for Students

- During the school year, parents will be required to actively screen their children for symptoms of COVID-19 and potential exposures each day before attending school. As a result, possible symptoms of COVID-19 may be identified more often, leading to increased consultation with healthcare providers and testing. Guidance for parents (including a copy of the screening tool) are available on WDGPH's website at wdgpublichealth.ca/BackToSchool.

- Healthcare providers can play an important role in helping their patients answer the screening questions with considerations for underlying causes of specific symptoms:

  o Is a cough "new or worsening cough" (more than usual)?
  o Is a sore throat and/or runny nose and/or stuffy/congested nose *unrelated* to seasonal allergies or other known causes/conditions?
  o Are digestive issues like nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain *unrelated* to other known causes or conditions?

- If a child answers yes to any of the screening questions, the child must not go to school and must self-isolate. The child is recommended to be tested for COVID-19.

- Healthcare providers can play an important role in encouraging testing as it relates to the return to school protocol below.

Return to School Protocol for Students

- While a student is waiting for COVID-19 test results, they must remain in self-isolation and cannot attend school in-person.

Negative COVID-19 Results	Not Tested for COVID-19	Positive COVID-19 Results
If student is symptom free for 24 hours* and can pass the COVID-19 screening tool, they can return to school. Documented proof of the negative test result is not required to return to school. *Mild symptoms known to persist in young children (e.g., runny nose) may be ongoing at time of return to school if other symptoms have been resolved and there is a negative test.	Students must remain home for 14 days from the onset of symptoms AND be symptom-free for 24 hours before returning to school. **OR** Student has an alternative diagnosis from primary care provider who can confirm symptoms are not due to COVID-19 AND be symptom-free for 24 hours.	Students who test positive for COVID-19 will remain in isolation until three conditions have been met: 1) They have isolated for 14 days after the onset of symptoms. 2) They no longer have a fever. 3) Their symptoms have been improving for at least 72 hours. Children do not need clearance testing or medical notes to return to school.

Requests for Medical Notes

- It is not recommended that healthcare providers provide medical notes or statements attesting to clinical assessment that COVID-19 has been "ruled out".

- Medical notes or proof of negative tests are not required for students to return to school for any scenario in the table above. WDG Public Health has been working with school boards and schools to communicate this message broadly.

References

1. Public Health Ontario. COVID19 – What we know so far about …. infection in children. [Internet]. 2020 May 15 [cited 2020 Aug 24]. Available from: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/what-we-know-children-feb-21-2020.pdf
2. Ontario. Ministry of Health. COVID-19 provincial testing guidance update. [Internet]. 2020 Aug 14 [cited 2020 Aug 24]. Available from: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_testing guidance.pdf
3. Ontario. Ministry of Health. COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms. [Internet]. 2020 Aug 6 [cited 2020 Sept 09]. Available from: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf
4. Ontario. Ministry of Health. COVID-19 quick reference public health guidance on testing and clearance. [Internet]. 2020 Jul 29 [cited 2020 Sept 09]. Available from: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_testing_clearing_cases_guidance.pdf

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