



Media Release

August 17, 2020

Medical Officer of Health Open Letter to Parents and Guardians of School-Aged Children

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As the Medical Officer of Health for Grey Bruce, I want to thank you for the great efforts you have invested in keeping your family and our community safe over the past few months.

I want to support you and your family as you consider the decision to send your child or children back to school in September. Our children need to interact with their friends, learn collectively, and return to a predictable and stable learning environment. Returning to school is vital for their education and is indispensable for their overall wellbeing. This year we are thinking not just about school supplies and arranging back to school care for our youngsters but also about their health and safety.

We have a relatively exceptional situation in Grey and Bruce. We achieved high level of prevention of transmission and optimal control over the outbreak in April, and we have continued to maintain this control during the reopening stages. This control is directly related to the collective effort from all of us. By "us," I mean the community-at-large, public health, local municipal leaders, local provincial and federal leaders, the provincial government, professional journalism, first responders, non-government organizations and many other stakeholders. This relatively positive situation will allow us to provide our children with the safe school reopening they deserve.

As our community reopens, I have no doubt we will see more cases of COVID-19. With a pandemic, the spread of the virus will not stop until a herd immunity (70% of the population immune) is reached, preferably through a vaccine. Until then, the goal is to implement strategies to ensure a balanced approach of mitigating the risk of virus transmission and providing our kids with the appropriate level of social and educational experience, and well-being. We want parents to have all the information they need to feel confident in their decision on whether to send their kids back to school, and reassured that children and teachers are safe in their classrooms. The decision to send your child or children back to school is personal and might be different for every family.

A healthier future for all.

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For weeks, the Grey Bruce Public Health Unit has been in close communication with school officials from all schools in Grey and Bruce to support their planning proactively. Working tirelessly, your Health Unit's team and I are committed to creating a safe and caring learning environment. We will continue to work together to best position our schools for safe and successful reopening. I can reassure you that contact tracing (contact management) is being conducted robustly daily in Grey and Bruce's communities. For more on contact tracing, see [COVID-19 Contact Tracing - More than a Phone Call](#) or see our video [What is Contact Tracing](#). These measures, along with active and passive surveillance and outbreak management, will be immediately deployed in all schools in Grey and Bruce when needed to break the transmission chain.

School reopening is directed provincially by the Ministry of Education through guidance documents and regulations. As they tend to be during emergencies, the guidance and regulations are most likely to be renewed and changed in the coming weeks as consultations from stakeholders occur and as the dynamics of the outbreak evolve. Your Health Unit and your Medical Officer of Health, will keep you posted with new information and recommendations as the situation develops. We will do this through different media, whether be it indirectly through communication through schools or directly through multiple town halls with parents, media releases, among others.

As families consider making decisions about sending their kids to school, it is essential to remember that we have a relatively favourable situation in Grey and Bruce. Most children infected with COVID get a very mild illness and recover without much help. Some medical conditions, such as lung diseases, autoimmune disorders, cancer or diabetes, among others, can make them prone to severe illness and complications if they get COVID-19. As your Medical Officer of Health, I encourage you to talk to your child's health care provider about conditions that might put your child at risk. Remember, in making this decision that for most kids, the benefits of being in school outweigh the risks.

Furthermore, although sending your child to school may increase the risk of getting COVID-19, keeping your child at home does not reduce the risk to zero. There will always be potential transmission within the family bubble. Additionally, keeping a child at home may impact their social, mental and developmental wellbeing. There is no one right decision for all kids and families - only what is right for your child and your family.

Regarding your family, while your child returns to school: Again, most people will recover without help if they get COVID-19. The people at risk for severe outcomes are those over 70 or have chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease or cancer, among others. These people (including you) may need extra protection if you are living together in the same household. Should there be a medically fragile person in your home, you will need to consider the risk to that person against the

important benefits of sending your child to school. There is no perfect answer - make a decision that feels right to you at the time, as there will be an opportunity to adjust and adapt as the local circumstances around COVID-19 changes. Work with your family to create a family isolation plan to keep symptomatic family members away from the vulnerable person(s). This intentional step to reduce the exposure of vulnerable people in your household to other social networks will lower the risk of disease transmission.

As we move forward, the partnership between Grey Bruce Public Health and your local school community will be secure, and we continue to work together to help your children learn safely, and I remain,

Yours very truly,

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