



Media Release

September 22, 2020

Update - COVID-19 Testing in Grey Bruce

The Grey Bruce Health Unit is re-enforcing the 24-hour symptom free protocol when determining if a student should return to school.

This may, at times, be at odds with the advice provided by the provincial [COVID-19 School Screening Tool](#), but is being adopted on the abundance of caution.

We realize that this is a difficult time for everybody, but we all need to be patient and stick to a conservative approach with a measured reduction in restrictions to ensure safety. A safe reopening will not be the opening we had on normal years, rather a modified normality.

In response to the surge in the number of people attending assessment centres, Public Health has taken the adaptive approach in directing school partners in adopting the newly released provincial [COVID-19 school screening](#) tool. As such, this shift in protocol will provide for greater flexibility within the system to address local needs.

The surge in the number of people attending assessment centers in the past days has been related to two distinct reasons. The first reason was the heightened anxiety of worried parents seeking testing for the assurance their child was not infected. This was addressed by the September 15 [MOH Open Letter to Parents](#).

The second reason, a more significant issue for which we are still working on is related to the use of the provincial COVID-19 school screening tool. This concern seems to be due to a stringent “application” of the provincial screening tool at some schools. Out of abundance of caution, some school staff were sending students home after one sneeze; which is not one symptoms. We realize that school staff are not trained to make clinical decisions, and because of this the province developed the new electronic assessment tool.

The COVID-19 school screen tool was announced in the media Friday and sent to all schools to be utilized in making the medical decision. If you click through, you will find the decision is made through a question and answer the algorithm imbedded in the tool. The tool began to be used for the first time in Grey Bruce this Monday. Although we still see high number of students being tested, reports from our Public Health Nurses working with the schools indicate that the situation has been corrected. The high numbers of tests requests at assessment centres yesterday and today are result of last week’s assessments. We continue to monitor. If the surge continues, we would like to reassure you we have more measures to deploy.

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Currently, COVID-19 swabs are the only test available for public use in Ontario. Other types of tests such as saliva test are not currently available for public use in Ontario. When such test is available, we will communicate this to the public. There is no other test option available from your healthcare provider.

When someone without a COVID test presents with symptoms, we need to err on the conservative side and assume the symptoms are related to COVID. With COVID, a person will continue to shed the virus for up to 14 days regardless of symptoms. Therefore, without a negative test, the 14 days period is required. This is a provincial direction that the local Medical Officer of Health cannot override, and is the evidence-based practice that any competent practitioner would recommend.

Runny nose is an indication a child is probably shedding a virus. If the child is COVID negative, the bug may be a common cold or other respiratory virus. In that case, if the child goes back to class, there is a very good chance they may infect other children. Although we know it is not COVID, these infected children will be considered as COVID until proven otherwise. For the sake of one child returning a couple of days early, several more children may end up being sent home for a week or more. It is better to keep a child home until they are symptom free.

A symptomatic student and school staff will only be permitted to return to school if:

They have received a negative COVID test result and has been symptom free for 24 hours AND are able to pass the [Provincial Screening Tool](#).

Or

They have remained in home isolation for 14 days from the onset of symptoms AND are symptom-free for 24 hours before returning to school.

All asymptomatic members of the same household are to self-monitor for 14 days and take appropriate precautions should symptoms appear. Asymptomatic students in the same household may return to school and do not require a COVID-19 test.

Any asymptomatic individual (even if a contact of a symptomatic individual) does not need to be tested, unless directed to do so by Public Health.

The local assessment centres are not under the authority or mandate of Public Health. We continue to communicate and collaborate with hospital executives and physician leaders who operate the assessment centres. We are also advocating at different levels locally, provincially and nationally, for the establishment of additional new assessment centres in communities of Grey Bruce that do not have access to a local assessment centre.

“We are all in this together. If school reopening is going to work, it is not going to be the normal schools we once had, at least until the pandemic is over. At best, it will be a new modified normal.” says Dr. Ian Arra, Grey Bruce Medical Officer of Health.

For More Information:

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Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer

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