

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

## GENERAL

### 1. What has the Chief Medical Officer of Health directed, with respect to school board COVID-19 immunization disclosure policies?

On September 7, 2021, the Chief Medical Officer of Health issued instructions for the education sector that require all publicly-funded school boards to have a COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy in place for staff and other individuals who frequently attend the premises (schools or school board office) and may have direct contact with school board staff or students.

Individuals subject to a school board's immunization disclosure policy are required to provide proof of one of the following three things:

- **Full vaccination** against COVID-19; or
- A **medical reason** for not being vaccinated against COVID-19; or
- Completion of a COVID-19 vaccination **educational session** prescribed by the Ministry of Education.

Individuals who do not attest to being fully vaccinated, including those with a documented medical reason, are required to complete COVID-19 rapid antigen testing three times per week.

### 2. Has the government introduced mandatory vaccination for students and staff?

No. The Chief Medical Officer of Health has not introduced any mandatory vaccination requirements for the education sector, for school board staff or students.

### 3. Who is included in the school board's COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy?

COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy applies to the following groups, except where the individual works remotely and/or the individual's work does not involve in-person interactions:

- All school board employees/staff, including daily and long-term occasional teachers and casual education workers;
- School board trustees;
- Student transportation drivers, staff or other individuals who regularly supervise or transport children or students to or from school; and

The following individuals if they attend the school premises frequently and may have direct contact with staff or students:

- Students on educational placement, including professional services students on a placement/work-integrated learning visit (e.g., teacher candidate practicums, nurse, psychologist, behavioural therapist, speech-language pathologist, etc.);
- Volunteers;
- Those who provide professional services to children at school; and
- Visitors, including third-party contractors.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

School boards have been asked, in their reporting to the ministry, to be explicit on categories of individuals captured, including any deviations from the above list. There is a separate field in the reporting template to include any deviations from the above list.

### **4. Do individuals who are on leave from work (e.g., pregnancy/parental leave, sick leave, extended personal leave, etc.) or work remotely have to comply with a school board's immunization disclosure policy?**

The Chief Medical Officer of Health's instructions exclude individuals who work remotely and those whose work does not involve in-person interactions. Individuals who are on a leave from work and are not attending school settings or in direct contact with staff or students are not subject to this policy.

### **5. Are licensed child care operators and school bus operators expected to be covered by a school board's COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy?**

Licensed child care operators and school bus operators/companies that contract with or through transportation consortia to transport students to and from school on a regular basis are captured in the Letter of Instruction issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health on September 7, 2021. These organizations are required to establish and implement their own COVID-19 immunization disclosure policies, which cover their staff. As a result, school boards have not been directed to capture these individuals/organizations in their own policies.

### **6. Who is responsible for ensuring that the individuals covered by a school board's COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy are notified of that policy?**

Every school board shall ensure that its policy on COVID-19 immunization disclosure is available to all individuals who are subject to the policy, and that the policy is made available to parents and guardians.

While school boards should continue to encourage all individuals who work in or otherwise frequently visit schools to get vaccinated, communication about the policy should be provided in a manner that supports education and informed choice about COVID-19 vaccination.

### **7. Why did the Chief Medical Officer of Health issue instructions that require school boards to have an immunization disclosure policy?**

Achieving high immunization rates in Ontario's schools through vaccination is part of a range of measures and actions that can help prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Vaccination against COVID-19 helps reduce the number of new cases with the overarching goal of keeping schools open and safe for in-person learning.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Support safer schools for Ontario's students and staff;
- Set out a provincially consistent approach to COVID-19 immunization disclosure policies in schools;
- Optimize COVID-19 vaccination rates in schools;
- Ensure that individuals have access to reliable information to support informed decisions about COVID-19 vaccination; and

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

- Ensure that individuals who are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are being routinely tested for COVID-19.

### 8. When did these requirements take effect?

By September 27, 2021, school boards were expected to have fully implemented their COVID-19 immunization disclosure policies.

### 9. How much time do newly hired/retained individuals have to come into compliance with a school board's immunization disclosure policy?

It is expected that newly hired or retained individuals provide an attestation where applicable on or before the first day of attending a school board site, where possible.

### 10. Are school boards required to accommodate employees based on their vaccination status?

If a request for accommodation is made based on an individual's vaccination status, then school boards are advised to follow existing policies and procedures and work with the individual employee's union representative on an accommodation plan, if applicable. School boards may also wish to seek legal counsel to establish whether a duty to accommodate exists.

### 11. What is acceptable proof of vaccination?

For individuals who were vaccinated in Ontario, the only acceptable proof of vaccination is presenting the physical or electronic receipt provided by the Ministry of Health or an enhanced vaccine certificate with official QR code. Individuals who misplace their receipt can obtain a replacement copy by logging into the provincial vaccine portal or calling the Provincial Vaccine Booking Line at 1-833-943-3900.

For individuals vaccinated outside of Ontario, the jurisdiction where the vaccine was administered will have issued some form of official documentation. As of August 24, 2021, all receipts for World Health Organization approved vaccines are available online.

### 12. What happens if someone has had their first dose of a two-dose vaccine series but does not provide proof of a second dose?

If an individual subject to the school board's COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy does not provide proof of having received all of the required doses of a World Health Organization approved vaccine, they are required to provide a medical reason for not receiving the second dose or participate in the educational session prescribed by the Ministry of Education, and continue to complete regular COVID-19 testing three times per week.

### 13. What is required of an individual who provides proof of a scheduled appointment for their second/remaining COVID-19 vaccination dose(s)?

If an individual has received one vaccine dose and can demonstrate they are scheduled to receive the final dose(s) of a World Health Organization approved vaccine, they are not required to participate in an educational session but must complete regular COVID-19 testing three times per week until they are fully vaccinated. It is incumbent on the school

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy**

board to follow-up with the individual to ensure a vaccine attestation is submitted once the individual is fully vaccinated.

### **14. What happens if an individual has a medical condition that prevents them from being vaccinated?**

If an individual cannot be vaccinated due to a medical reason, the school board must ensure that the individual produces written proof of the medical reason, provided by either a physician or registered nurse in the Extended Class (commonly referred to as a nurse practitioner). The written proof must include the medical reason that the person cannot be vaccinated against COVID-19 and the effective time period for the medical reason (i.e., permanent or time-limited). If the reason is time-limited, the written proof must set out how long the reason is in place (e.g., six months, one year, etc.). The person will need to undergo regular rapid antigen testing three times per week.

### **15. What happens if an individual has a time-limited medical reason for not being vaccinated?**

If an individual is unable to receive their vaccine for a medical reason but that reason is valid for a limited time, the school board must follow-up with them once that time period has expired and ensure the individual provides proof of vaccination or proof that the individual has completed the educational session prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The individual will need to undergo regular rapid antigen testing three times per week until they are fully vaccinated.

### **16. What happens if an individual objects to being vaccinated on religious/ conscientious grounds?**

If an individual objects to vaccination for any reason other than a medical reason, including based on religious or conscientious grounds, the school board is required to ensure that the individual participates in the educational session prescribed by the Ministry of Education, and undergo regular rapid antigen testing three times per week.

As it stands, a medical exemption is the only reason an unvaccinated individual is not required to participate in the educational session. Other than for a medical reason, individuals are not required to make any disclosure on their reason for not being fully vaccinated, nor are school boards expected to collect or report this information.

### **17. When are individuals expected to test or watch the required educational video?**

Individuals are expected to fulfill testing requirements and/or watch the ministry prescribed educational video outside of working hours.

## **REPORTING & INFORMATION SHARING**

### **18. What type of data are school boards required to report to the ministry regarding their COVID-19 immunization disclosure policies?**

Every school board must collect, maintain, and disclose to the Ministry of Education, on a monthly basis and in a manner set out by the ministry, the following statistical information:

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

1. Total number of individuals to which this policy will apply;
2. Total number of individuals who have attested to being fully vaccinated, with supporting documentation;
3. Total number of individuals who have attested to being fully vaccinated without supporting documentation;
4. Total number of individuals who have attested to having received the required doses of the vaccination, except 14 days has not yet passed since their last vaccination date OR who are partially vaccinated and have attested to having a scheduled appointment for the second/final vaccination dose;
5. Total number of individuals who have attested to having a documented medical reason for not being fully vaccinated;
6. Total number of individuals who have attested to not being fully vaccinated (excluding those in 4 and 5 above);
7. Total number of individuals who have not yet submitted the attestation;
8. Of those in 6 above, total number of individuals who completed an educational session about the benefits of COVID-19 vaccination;
9. Of those in 6 above, total number of individuals who have not yet completed an educational session about the benefits of COVID-19 vaccination;
10. Total number of individuals who have been placed on leave or terminated as a result of refusing to participate in rapid antigen testing; ;
11. Percentage of individuals who have attested to being fully immunized (with supporting documentation);
12. Percentage of individuals who have attested to being fully immunized (without supporting documentation); and
13. Percentage of individuals who have attested to being fully immunized (with or without supporting documentation) out of those individuals who have submitted an attestation.

Per the template issued by the Ministry of Education, the aforementioned information is to be provided for three categories of individuals as follows:

- I. School board employees and trustees, excluding occasional/casual employees
- II. Occasional/casual school board employees
- III. Other individuals frequently in schools or other settings who may have direct contact with students or staff (e.g. visitors, volunteers, contractors, other professionals and student transportation drivers).

School boards are also asked, in their reporting to the ministry, to be explicit on categories of individuals captured, including any deviations from the above list.

### **19. Does this policy permit a school board to share the vaccination status of staff with local public health units?**

The instructions issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health do not provide new authorities related to the sharing of personal health information. As such, school boards continue to be responsible for complying with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and other applicable legislation when collecting, using and disclosing personal information, and may only share personal health information within the authorities and requirements outlined in relevant legislation. To support case and contact management, school boards are encouraged to discuss how they can share information on staff vaccination status with local public health units, within their existing authorities. School

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

boards are encouraged to obtain their own legal advice to ensure that they are complying with their privacy obligations.

### REQUIREMENTS FOR NON-SCHOOL BOARD STAFF

**20. When a licensed child care centre is co-located with a public school, should the staff/volunteers and other individuals associated with the child care centre be captured under the school board's immunization disclosure policy or the licensed child care immunization disclosure policy?**

Licensed child care centres located in schools are not to be captured as part of a school board's immunization disclosure policy. Licensed child care programs are required to have their own policy in place. School boards may include authorized recreation providers or other recreation programs operating out of the school consistent with the school board's immunization policy and direction from the Chief Medical Officer of Health. We encourage school boards/schools and child care centres to communicate at the local level and ensure both parties are aware of their respective obligations.

**21. Who is responsible for collecting attestations for student transportation drivers? Can a school board include school bus drivers in its policy?**

School boards have not been directed to collect vaccination attestations directly from student transportation drivers or companies that contract with or through transportation consortia, or require school bus drivers to comply with a board policy. Per the instructions issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, companies that contract with or through transportation consortia to transport students to and from school on a regular basis are required to implement immunization disclosure policies in their workplaces for their employees who transport or supervise students. Transportation consortia are encouraged to work with these student transportation companies to implement the policy and data collection processes in their workplaces.

Student transportation providers are expected to share aggregated, depersonalized statistical information with their consortia, and they in turn, are to share that data with the school boards they service. Every school board must include the Transportation Statistical Information in part III of the Vaccination Attestation Excel template under "other individuals frequently in schools or other settings who may have direct contact with students or staff".

**22. If an individual who is not employed by a school board is covered by an immunization disclosure policy at a school board and at their employer, do they have to provide attestations to both employer and the school board and/or be subject to duplicate testing?**

Individuals in these circumstances must provide their attestations and/or negative test results directly to the school board, but are not required to duplicate testing. Alternatively, third-party employers/agencies may elect to provide the attestation or negative test results of their employee to the school board, provided the individual consents to an indirect collection of personal health information by the board from the individual's employer and the board complies with its obligations under applicable privacy legislation.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

School boards are also not required to collect vaccination attestations directly from student transportation drivers or companies that contract with or through transportation consortia. Student transportation providers are expected to share aggregated, depersonalized statistical information with their consortia, and they in turn, are to share that data with the school boards they service.

### **23. If a third-party organization has an agreement with a school board to offer programs on school premises for staff and/or students, would they be subject to the school board's immunization disclosure policy?**

A school board's COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy must apply to all staff and other individuals who frequently attend the premises (schools or school board office) and may have direct contact with school board staff or students.

Based on these parameters, school boards are expected to determine if the school board's immunization disclosure policy is applicable.

### **24. My school board has volunteers that only come into schools for two hours once a week. Would they be subject to the school board's COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy?**

A school board's COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy must apply to all staff and other individuals who frequently attend the premises (schools or school board office) and may have direct contact with school board staff or students.

Based on these parameters, school boards are expected to determine if the school board's immunization disclosure policy is applicable.

## TESTING

### **25. How often is an individual who has not attested to being fully vaccinated subject to rapid antigen testing for COVID-19?**

The Ministry of Education has set its sector-specific policy of three times weekly rapid antigen testing frequency effective November 10, 2021 as an added measure to protect schools from the risk of COVID-19. This is in accordance with provincial antigen testing guidance which recommends 2-3 times per week for individuals who are not fully immunized.

### **26. How is testing to be implemented for individuals who are not at the school premises daily?**

Some individuals that are determined to be covered by a school board's immunization disclosure policy might not attend the board's premises daily and testing three times per week may not be possible or reasonable. In these cases, at a minimum, the individual must complete a rapid antigen test as part of screening and demonstrate a negative test result, no more than 48 hours prior to interacting with students or staff.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

### 27. How are the privacy and confidentiality of school board employees protected during the distribution of testing kits?

School boards need to ensure they are in compliance with their privacy obligations under applicable legislation and are encouraged to obtain their own privacy advice in putting policies and practices in place in order to ensure that the privacy of individuals who are taking the tests is protected.

### 28. When/where are these tests being conducted and by whom?

Testing is to take place prior to attending the board's premises, outside of working hours. Tests can be self-administered. Information and resources have been shared with school boards for assistance on the process of self-administering a COVID-19 rapid test kit.

### 29. What does a testing kit consist of?

Individuals receive a test kit that includes the full materials required to complete the test along with instructions. Resources are available to support in taking the test, at the following links:

How to test yourself with Panbio COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Screening Test At Home:

[https://www.ontariohealth.ca/sites/ontariohealth/files/2021-10/Panbio%20Self%20Screening%20Instructions\\_v3.1.pdf](https://www.ontariohealth.ca/sites/ontariohealth/files/2021-10/Panbio%20Self%20Screening%20Instructions_v3.1.pdf)

"How to test yourself with BD Veritor COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Screening Test" [PowerPoint Presentation \(ontariohealth.ca\)](#)

### 30. Who has access to test results?

School boards are required to determine appropriate procedures for handling confidential information in alignment with privacy requirements.

### 31. What happens if an individual tests positive?

Per guidance from the [Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health](#), any individual that receives a preliminary positive COVID-19 rapid antigen test, is required to:

- Seek a confirmatory PCR test immediately (ideally within 48 hours).
- Isolate immediately until the result of their confirmatory test is known.
- Safely return to work only when they receive a negative result from a confirmatory test at a designated testing centre.

An employer has no obligation to inform a public health unit of an employee's rapid antigen test result (regardless of whether it was positive or negative).

### 32. If an individual has had prior laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 infection in the past 90 days from the date of the positive PCR COVID-19 result, are they required to continue COVID-19 rapid antigen testing at a minimum frequency of three times per week?

Despite the requirements set out in the Chief Medical Officer of Health Letter of Instruction, the individual should not be re-tested except with new onset of signs or symptoms of COVID-19. Rapid antigen testing can also be considered:



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

- a. if there is exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19;
- b. if there is a COVID-19 outbreak in the school; and/or
- c. at the direction of the local public health unit.

If testing is required per the conditions above, these individuals should be directed to obtain a diagnostic (PCR) test instead of a rapid antigen test. Rapid antigen testing is appropriate for use in asymptomatic individuals only.

Resuming Testing after having COVID-19: Every school board must ensure that an individual who is subject to a school board's immunization disclosure policy and not fully vaccinated, who has had a prior laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 infection, immediately resumes COVID-19 rapid antigen testing at a minimum frequency of three times per week, after the 90th day from the date of their positive COVID-19 PCR result.

### **33. What happens for individuals who received their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccination less than 14 days ago - do they have to complete rapid tests until they are able to attest to being fully vaccinated?**

Yes. If a person subject to the school board's COVID-19 immunization disclosure policy does not provide proof of having received all of the required doses of a World Health Organization approved vaccine at least 14 days ago, they are required to complete regular COVID-19 testing at a minimum frequency of three times per week.

### **34. Are the rapid antigen test kits safe for individual use?**

Yes. The Government of Ontario puts the safety of Ontarians first. All products distributed to school boards have Health Canada's approval.

Prior to a diagnostic or screening (rapid antigen) test being made available in Ontario, the test itself undergoes an in-depth evaluation through Health Canada's approval processes. Following Health Canada's approval, Ontario often undertakes its own review to validate the use of the test in the province.

In addition, prior to being accepted into the province's pandemic stockpile, all products undergo a rigorous quality assurance process when they arrive to our warehouses to ensure that they are safe and effective for use.

We know that a significant amount of information can be found on social media and via other sources about COVID-19 tests and how they are manufactured. Ontario is confident that the tests are safe, and the mechanisms used to sterilize the test swabs do not pose a risk to the health of Ontarians. Many solutions are commonly used in the sterilization of swabs in the health care industry and are adopted for use to keep medical devices safe; the sterilization mechanisms are also rigorously controlled by national standards.

### **35. Where should individuals dispose of the used test kits?**

Test kits can be disposed of at home, through regular waste collection channels.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

### 36. Are school boards expected to support the distribution of test kits to other organizations, such as licensed child care programs and/or school bus operators/consortia?

Most licensed child care programs in the province have been assigned to a local school to pick-up their allocation of rapid antigen tests and these test kits have been accounted for in the board or school's shipment. Schools and school boards are expected to support the distribution of these test kits by working with child care programs to arrange pick-up times and ensuring these programs can obtain their test kits in a reasonable time period. Child care programs were notified of their assigned school through the ministry's child care licensing system and have been encouraged to contact the school directly to arrange pick-up. Additionally, the list of child care programs that have been directed to schools has been shared with the School Board Offices and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) leads in boards and is also posted on the Ministry's PPE Sharepoint site (accessible to PPE leads). School boards are encouraged to share this information with any other relevant staff in your board.

School bus consortia are expected to work with the school boards that they service to access testing kits.

## EDUCATIONAL SESSION

### 37. How can school boards access the educational session?

School boards are required to use a video resource selected by the Ministry of Education as the educational session for unvaccinated individuals. The ministry shared the video resource with school boards on September 14, 2021.

Please find the links to the videos below:

- [COVID-19 Vaccination Information for Educators](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccination Information for Educators \(with ASL interpretation\)](#)
- [Informations sur le vaccin contre la COVID-19 à l'intention des éducateurs](#)
- [Informations sur le vaccin contre la COVID-19 à l'intention des éducateurs \(avec interprétation en LSQ\)](#)

### 38. Do individuals need to complete the educational session more than once?

The Chief Medical Officer of Health's instructions do not require completion of the educational session more than once.

### 39. What is acceptable proof of having completed the educational session?

School boards are encouraged to plan for an approach for individuals to provide proof that they have completed the educational session. This could take the form of having the individual sign a form which says the individual completed the educational session (i.e., an attestation).

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy

### COMPLIANCE

#### 40. What if an individual refuses to submit an attestation, get tested and/or complete the educational session? Are there any repercussions?

School boards are required to determine appropriate next steps in these circumstances in accordance with their respective human resource policies and legal obligations.

### COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

#### 41. Do vaccination requirements apply to the community use of schools?

Effective September 22, 2021, patrons seeking access to particular areas of certain businesses or organizations in Ontario must show proof of identification and proof of being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 before they can enter the area, with limited exceptions. See section 2.1 of Schedule 1 to [O. Reg. 364/20](#) and [Proof of Vaccination Guidance for Businesses and Organizations under the Reopening Ontario Act](#) (Ministry of Health guidance) for further information.

While school boards are not subject to the proof of vaccination requirements under O. Reg. 364/20 when operating schools pursuant to the *Education Act*, when a school board rents out its space (i.e., Community Use of Schools) for a purpose outlined in section 2.1 of O. Reg. 364/20, the proof of vaccination requirements would apply at the time of use.

While school boards may meet the requirements of section 2.1 of O. Reg. 364/20 through their own staff or through appropriate arrangements with community users, school boards should consult their own legal counsel to determine how best to meet these requirements, or more generally about the application of the *Reopening Ontario Act* or O. Reg. 364/20.

Ontario's schools are community hubs where all people can gather to learn and participate in a range of activities offered by community organizations. The Ministry of Education strongly supports continued access to Community Use of Schools, and has communicated this support to all school boards.