



Premier of Ontario
Premier ministre
de l'Ontario

Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A1

Édifice de l'Assemblée législative
Queen's Park
Toronto (Ontario)
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To whom it may concern:

I am writing today seeking your input on the possible safe return to schools before the end of this academic year. No one wants to see our schools reopen safely more than I do. Our government understands the benefits of having children learning in class. At the same time, our top priority is to ensure any decision we make on school reopening is based on sound scientific advice, consensus and considers potential or future risks faced by students and staff.

In recent weeks, there has been a wide range of advice and commentary around the reopening of schools in Ontario. There is consensus in some quarters on how, when and whether schools should reopen, and diverse and conflicting views in others. Keeping children safe is our foremost consideration, which is why as experts in health, public health and education we are seeking your perspective.

Thanks to the hard work of Ontarians across the province, public health indicators are moving in the right direction. Last week, our government, in consultation with our Chief Medical Officer of Health, released our three step Roadmap to Reopen. While we look forward to gradually reopening the province, we all must remain vigilant.

We know the mental health, academic and other challenges some students have faced with at-home learning, particularly those from low-income, racialized and high needs neighbourhoods. Those same neighbourhoods are often in COVID hotspots, and we know that school cases are amplified by what is happening in the community. The difficult decision to close schools is not far behind us and just prior to that, in April, schools were the sources of more outbreaks than workplaces or any other location. That is why we want to take a gradual approach to returning.

Ontario is not an island. Keeping our students and school staff, and their families, safe in a global pandemic must include global considerations, especially the impact of new, more dangerous variants that have now entered our communities through Canada's borders.

Recent modelling presented by the Science Table suggested that should Ontario reopen schools to in-class learning we could see an increase of six to 11 per cent in the number of new daily cases.¹ We are expecting new modelling this week that puts the range of new cases associated with school reopening between 2,000 to 4,000 cases by the end of July. This is concerning. At the same time we know other jurisdictions are seeing a rapid increase in new, more dangerous variants that are more contagious, make people and children in particular sicker, are potentially more deadly and are more resistant to vaccines.

¹ <https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/sciencebrief/update-on-covid-19-projections-8/>



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A recent study from Public Health England by the U.K. government indicated a single dose of either the Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine was just 33% effective against the COVID-19 variant first identified in India. The study found “one dose offered 33 per cent protection against symptomatic infection from B.1.617.2, and 51 per cent against B.1.1.7. This suggests a single shot offers 35 per cent less protection against B.1.617.2 compared with B.1.1.7, according to Financial Times analysis.”² Other jurisdictions - including Singapore - have recently closed in person learning as a direct result of that variant.³ That variant is also on the rise in Ontario.

What makes all this new information concerning is that according to the most recent data in the provincial COVAX system, which tracks who gets vaccinated in Ontario and when, only 41 per cent of teachers and education workers are vaccinated compared to 62 per cent of the general adult population in Ontario.

Vaccines remain our best defence against COVID-19. To date, Ontario has successfully administered more than 8,530,000 doses. As of May 23, 2021, Ontarians aged 12 and up are now eligible to book a vaccine through the provincial booking system. We are getting doses into arms as quickly as possible, but due to lack of sufficient supply, children may not be vaccinated before a return to school in June.

As Premier, my priority throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has always been to protect the health and safety of Ontarians. We need now to ensure there is broad consensus from our medical, public health, and education experts that returning to school is the right thing to do. I've always said we have the best minds in the world right here in Ontario and that together we make the best decisions.

Ultimately, this is our government's decision, but in light of the foregoing, and the diversity of perspectives on the safety of reopening schools, I am asking for your views on a number of issues.

To help guide any decisions regarding schools, and ensure any decision on reopening in-class learning protects students and staff, I am asking for your perspective on the following questions that have been raised as concerns to our government:

1. Is the reopening of schools for in person learning safe for students?
2. Is the reopening of schools for in person learning safe for teachers and all education staff?

² <https://www.ft.com/content/a70d423a-7d7c-4736-8828-0a485d7c3a8e>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/singapore-warns-children-susceptible-virus-variants-shuts-schools-2021-05-17/>



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3. There are a growing number of cases in Ontario of the variant first identified in India (B.1.617). Does this mutation pose an increased risk to students and education workers?
4. The modelling from the Ontario Science Table has suggested that reopening schools will lead to an increase in cases in the province of Ontario, is this acceptable and safe?
5. Other countries are warning mutations including the B.1.617 variant⁴⁵ are putting children at much greater risk and are shutting schools down. Is this concern not shared by medical experts in Ontario?
6. Should teachers be fully vaccinated before resuming in class lessons and if not, is one dose sufficient?
7. Under Ontario's reopening plan, indoor gatherings won't commence until July. Should indoor school instruction resume before then?

I ask you to provide your responses to the specific question no later than 5:00 p.m. on Friday, May 28, 2021.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Doug Ford'.

Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario

CC:

Ontario Medical Association
SickKids Hospital
Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO)
London Health Sciences
McMaster Children's Hospital
Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
Empowered Kids Ontario
Children's Mental Health Ontario

⁴ abc.net.au/news/2021-05-17/singapore-warns-children-susceptible-to-covid-indian-variant/100144908

⁵ <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/india-deals-with-fears-about-a-third-covid-19-wave-affecting-kids>



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Ontario Hospital Association
Canadian Paediatric Society
Pediatricians Alliance of Ontario
University Health Network
Science Advisory Table
Dr David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
The District of Algoma Health Unit, Dr. Jennifer Loo
Brant County Health Unit, Dr. Elizabeth Urbantke
Chatham-Kent Health Unit, Dr. David Colby
Durham Regional Health Unit, Dr. Robert Kyle
Eastern Ontario Health Unit, Dr. Paul Roumeliotis
Grey Bruce Health Unit, Dr. Ian Arra
Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit, Dr. Shanker Nesathurai
Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit, Dr. Natalie Bocking
Halton Region Health, Department Dr. Hamidah Meghani
City of Hamilton, Public Health Services, Dr. Elizabeth Richardson
Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit, Dr. Piotr Oglaza
Huron Perth Health Unit, Dr. Miriam Klassen
Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Health Unit, Dr. Kieran Moore
Lambton Health Unit, Dr. Sudit Ranade
Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit, Dr. Paula Stewart Middlesex-London Health Unit,
Dr. Christopher Mackie
Niagara Region Public Health Department, Dr. Mustafa Hirji
North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, Dr. Jim Chirico
Northwestern Health Unit, Dr. Kit Young Hoon
Ottawa Public Health, Dr. Vera Etches
Oxford Elgin St. Thomas Health Unit, Dr. Joyce Lock
Peel Public Health, Dr. Lawrence Loh
Peterborough County-City Health Unit, Dr. Rosana Salvaterra
Porcupine Health Unit, Dr. Lianne Catton
Renfrew County & District Health Unit, Dr. Robert Cushman
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Dr. Charles Gardner
Sudbury and District Health Unit, Dr. Penny Sutcliffe
Thunder Bay District Health Unit, Dr. Janet DeMille
Timiskaming Health Unit, Dr. Glenn Corneil
City of Toronto Health Unit, Dr. Eileen de Villa
Region of Waterloo, Public Health, Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang
Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Unit, Dr. Nicola Mercer
Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, Dr. Wajid Ahmed
York Region Public Health, Dr. Karim Kurji



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Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association
Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation
Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario
Education Workers' Alliance of Ontario
Ontario Council of Educational Workers