



Thunder Bay District Health Unit

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November 4, 2022

Dear Parents and Caregivers of School-aged Children:

In recent weeks, we have seen a significant increase in respiratory viruses and illness in our communities. This level of illness has increased even over pre-pandemic levels. We are experiencing an early start to the influenza (“the flu”) season in our area with the flu spreading now and expected to increase over the coming weeks. COVID-19 is also spreading at moderate to high levels and it is anticipated to increase.

Unfortunately, the coming weeks and months will be challenging for children and youth, families, and schools. Current high rates of absenteeism for students and staff will continue to disrupt the school experience, as well as community activities like sports.

We have tools to mitigate the impact these viruses will have in our area. I would like to remind you of actions you can take as parents and caregivers:

Stay home if sick

- If your child has any symptoms of illness, they should stay home until they are feeling better for at least 24 hours and have no fever (48 hours if they have gastrointestinal symptoms).
- Use the screening tool at [Ontario.ca/school-screening](https://ontario.ca/school-screening) and follow the instructions at the end. The tool also gives advice for household members.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who may be vulnerable and more at risk for serious illness.
- Visit [Ontario.ca/public-health-measures-and-advice](https://ontario.ca/public-health-measures-and-advice) for more information. You can also call the Provincial Testing and Isolation Information line at 1-888-777-0730, open 7 days a week from 8:00 am-6:00 pm.

Vaccinations for flu and COVID-19

Vaccines are safe, effective and offer the best defense from serious illness. Babies and young children under 5 years, as well as children and youth with underlying conditions, are at higher risk of complications from these viruses. I strongly encourage you to have your children vaccinated and to be up to date on their immunizations. I also encourage all family and other household members to be up to date on these vaccines. This will improve protection for the whole family and for any individuals who may be more vulnerable, such as those under 6 months of age who are not eligible.

- Vaccines are available for anyone aged 6 months and older to protect against influenza and COVID-19.
- Information on COVID-19 vaccines for children and youth can be found at: [TBDHU.com/doses](https://tbdhu.com/doses) and for flu vaccine at: [TBDHU.com/GettingTheFluShot](https://tbdhu.com/GettingTheFluShot). If you have further questions, consult your health care professional or other credible sources.
- Visit [TBDHU.com/covidclinics](https://tbdhu.com/covidclinics) for where to access vaccines.

Wearing a mask

Masks remain an important layer of protection that can reduce the spread of respiratory viruses, influenza and COVID-19.

- Individuals who are recovering from COVID-19 or who have symptoms of COVID-19 should wear a well-fitted, high-quality mask outside the home for 10 days. Close contacts (such as household members) should also wear a mask during this time.
- It is also encouraged at this time that individuals wear a mask in indoor public settings, particularly when in close contact with others or in settings that are crowded and/or poorly ventilated.

Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Encourage your child to practice regular hand hygiene by washing with soap and water when available, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or elbow is also important.

Thank you to all parents and caregivers for your ongoing efforts to help reduce the impact of these viruses on children, families, and schools.

Sincerely,

Dr. Janet DeMille, MPH, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health
Thunder Bay District Health Unit