

Lecce announces additional protections with students set for January 17 return to school

By Rob Paul

With the recent confirmation that students will be returning to in-person learning on January 17, Ontario Education Minister Stephen Lecce on Wednesday announced measures being put in place for a safer return.

Lecce said that there will be strong protections in place supported by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Kieran Moore, and that the Children's Health Coalition (representing Sick Kids and all paediatric hospitals) have endorsed the return.

The return plan is focused on deploying millions of rapid tests to schools and childcare centres, enhancing ventilation, providing high-quality PPE, and increasing access to vaccines for children and staff, according to Lecce.

He also announced that rapid antigen tests will be provided for schools and childcare, children in childcare settings, and students in public elementary schools. Staff and students are expected to receive two tests each as the initial supply with 3.9 million rapid tests being shipped to schools in time for January 17?the tests are for use when symptomatic.

?We believe so strongly that children need to be in school; it's crucial to the mental and physical health of a child and to their academic success,? said Lecce. ?We have been cautious throughout this pandemic, and we've pivoted when required to ensure we protect our schools, our communities, and our collective progress as we work together to get kids back to school and our lives back on track.?

To help with booster coverage for education and childcare staff workers as they return, Lecce and Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones announced accelerated access with additional vaccine clinics in the GTA and Hamilton (GTHA).

?Our government has enhanced ventilation in every school, deployed high-quality PPE, and are accelerating access to the COVID-19 vaccine booster for all education and childcare staff,? said Lecce. ?As we work to get children back to class, we are taking swift action to establish additional clinics?open seven days a week?that will provide further protection for Ontario's school communities.?

The 10 additional clinics, located in Toronto?Yonge Street?Midtown, Eaton Centre, Richmond Hill, Mississauga, Vaughan, Pickering, Hamilton, Oakville and Brampton will serve education and childcare staff in the GTHA during dedicated time slots.

?The province continues to deliver booster doses as quickly and conveniently as possible, and we are expanding our efforts to additional vaccine clinics in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area,? said Jones. ?A third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine offers additional protection against the Omicron variant, and we continue to urge everyone to get their booster dose as soon as possible.?

Efforts to increase vaccine coverage and third booster shots have continued in Peel where 2,978,958 doses have been administered. 1,380,755 individuals have one dose, 1,233,036 have both doses, and 365,167 have received their third dose booster.

The Region now has 77.9 per cent of all residents with two dose coverage and 83.5 per cent with single dose. 89.3 per cent of those 12 and older are double vaccinated and 92.5 per cent have initiated the vaccination process?82.2 per cent of all eligible residents (5+) have both doses and 88.1 per cent have one.

In Peel, there have been 8,771 new COVID-19 cases in the last week to bring the total to 150,322. The Region's death count has now risen to 1,057 with 14 new deaths since last week.

Caledon has seen 361 new cases over the last week to bring the Town total to 6,608. There was one new death with the count now

up to 23.

To book a vaccine in the Region of Peel, visit www.peelregion.ca/coronavirus/vaccine/book-appointment/. To schedule a third dose booster, visit covid19.ontariohealth.ca/.

To download or print a copy of your proof of vaccination, visit covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-vaccine-booking-support#proof-of-vaccination.

To learn more about the official QR code system Ontario has implemented and to access yours, visit covid-19.ontario.ca/get-proof/.