



December 16th, 2021

Dear Waterloo Catholic Community –

As I write this letter we sit on the cusp of our Christmas break and perhaps more than ever, we can all appreciate the need for a pause. If I am to be honest, we are not heading into the break as optimistically as we were even just a week or two ago. The situation has changed fairly rapidly and so we have a few things of which to take note. I do want to acknowledge that it has been a remarkable fall and early winter, and it is indeed a true testament to everyone in the entire WCDSB community that we made it to Christmas with all our schools still open and truly thriving, despite the reality of the pandemic. Thank you to everyone in our WCDSB family for your ongoing efforts which have made the school re-opening process so successful, and for adhering to public health and safety measures that have ensured schools remain a safe place for our students and staff.

A few points of update:

Vaccination:

Vaccination for children ages 5 – 11 is currently underway. Booster shots for anyone over 18 years of age will be possible as of this Monday, December 20th. Vaccination remains the best defence against COVID-19, as endorsed by experts at the Ontario Science table, the Chief Medical Officer of Health and our own Waterloo Region Public Health. The omicron variant is highly transmissible and so consideration for vaccination for yourself and your child is very important in stopping the disease spread. Stopping its spread is important so that everyone can spend more time in school and so the most vulnerable amongst us are not negatively impacted.

Socializing:

The holidays are typically characterized as a time to gather. Please consider if all public health guidelines are being observed and ensure you do not gather if you are not well. Our children will rely on us to guide them and to make strong responsible decisions on their behalf.

Rapid Antigen Test Kits:

All students have received 5 rapid antigen test screening kits. They are to be used in the 10 days proceeding the start of in person schooling. The earliest date one should be used is December 23rd. Assuming the start of school remains January 3rd, they should be used every other day starting on the 23rd. Instructions have been provided by your local school, along with instruction videos in multiple languages.

Potential for School Closure:

At the current time we have no indication from the province or Waterloo Region Public Health that we will not be returning in January. Nonetheless we are sending children home with Chromebooks where needed, should anything change over the holidays. If the date for the re-opening of school changes to a date later than January 3rd, we will notify you of the date you should start using the Rapid Antigen Tests. Otherwise please begin on December 23rd, 2021.



Case and Contact Management:

When a student or staff member is a high-risk close contact of a positive case they must isolate. You will receive a letter and/or text message from Public Health with these details. It is important to note that *at the current time* if the positive case is the omicron variant, even if an individual is vaccinated, they have to quarantine. This is a change in practice, but it is in response to the highly transmissible nature of the variant.

Sports:

Waterloo Region Public Health has asked us to pause all athletics and extra-curriculars in our schools. We have had good success with our program and our health and safety support measures, however activity in the community – specifically a large hockey tournament has caused a sharp increase in our community. It is important to note that if you participate in a large community event, public health measures should still be observed and that when we let down our guard, that is when COVID can take hold and spread.

Screening

As a reminder, anyone feeling ill should not attend school. All children, students, staff, and visitors must be screened for symptoms of illness every day before attending school or childcare. To help meet this requirement, you may use the provincial screening tool found here: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>. Confirmation of Self-screening will still be a requirement when we return to school and we will continue to reinforce masking and hand hygiene, as well as cohorting and physical distancing with students and our staff.

Potential Travel

A reminder that students under 12, travelling with vaccinated parents do not have to quarantine per se, but they are not allowed to return to school until **14 days** from return have passed. This guidance is found on our webpage. This is federal policy we are sharing.
<https://www.wcdsb.ca/covid-19-student-screening-and-testing/>

We sincerely thank you for journeying with us. May each of you and your families enjoy a beautiful Christmas Season. A simpler Christmas firmly focused on family certainly sounds like the ideal and perhaps it will be a simple reminder that the first Christmas was indeed a humble beginning that provided the greatest gift the world has ever known. Let us continue to be people of hope who celebrate the birth of a tiny babe who shared a powerful message of love and salvation.

Sincerely,



Loretta Notten
Director of Education

