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GTA

# What we know about Ontario's plans to send kids back to school

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There are just a few weeks left before Ontario students return to school amid the [COVID-19](#) pandemic.

While elementary students will be in class full-time, students at large, urban public and Catholic boards such as Toronto, Peel, York, Halton and Durham will attend school in person for half the time — and only in smaller “cohorts” or groupings. More details are available in [the province's guide](#).

Here's what we know about the plan to reopen Ontario schools.

## Is attendance mandatory?

Attendance for students in elementary and secondary school [will be optional for 2020-2021](#). Remote learning will be available for families who choose this option.

## Elementary schools: Kindergarten to Grade 8

Currently, the plan is to send [elementary schoolchildren to school full-time](#), five days per week. Students in Grades 4 through 12 will be required to wear masks in class, while younger kids are encouraged to do so.

The province says students will be in “cohorts,” which means they will be with the same group of children throughout their school day to limit their exposure to others. Recesses, lunches, and bathroom breaks may be staggered.

Class sizes in elementary schools remain the same, with 20 students from Grades 1 to 3, and an average of about 25 in Grades 4 through 8. Some classes may be larger than that.

## Secondary schools: Grades 9-12

Designated school boards with larger student populations will switch to the alternate “adapted” model, where teens will be expected to be [in school about 50 per cent of the time](#), attending on alternate schedules and in groups of up to 15 people.

These are the designated school boards:

- Toronto and Toronto Catholic
- Peel and Dufferin-Peel Catholic

- York and York Catholic
- Durham and Durham Catholic
- Halton and Halton Catholic
- Waterloo and Waterloo Catholic
- Thames Valley and London Dist. Catholic
- Ottawa-Carleton and Ottawa Catholic
- Hamilton-Wentworth and Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic
- Niagara and Niagara Catholic
- Greater Essex County and Windsor-Essex Catholic
- Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est
- Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario

### What health precautions are being taken?

Last week, Ontario announced it will spend \$309 million on personal protective equipment for educators, additional staffing and cleaning supplies.

In addition to mandatory, non-medical masks for students in Grades 4-12, the province is encouraging hand hygiene, physical distancing and one-way use of hallways.

Students, teachers and staff are also required to “self-screen” for COVID-19 symptoms before attending school. For teachers or students who feel sick, there's an [online health assessment tool available here](#) that will advise them on how to proceed.

If a student or staff member has symptoms at school, they will be kept apart from others and supervised until they can return home.

If a parent or child test positive for COVID-19, he or she cannot return to school until cleared according to public health guidance. After the initial positive test, a test with a negative result is required, after which the student or teacher can return to school after being symptom-free for 24 hours.

### What about other school programs?

Before- and after-school programming will be available, with students grouped in cohorts.

Schools can offer clubs and organized sports if physical distancing is possible and equipment and spaces are cleaned and disinfected between each use. However, field trips or other activities requiring group transportation won't be allowed.

### Want more information?

Listen to the most recent episode of [This Matters](#). The Star's Queen's Park Bureau reporter Kristin Rushowy joins Saba Eitizaz to try to answer some of the [most burning questions that parents have](#) about how to navigate a back to school season while still battling a public health crisis.

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With files from [Kristin Rushowy](#).

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