



## **Ontario nurses welcome government's school reopening plan; say additional measures needed to stave off worst effects of fourth wave**

TORONTO – Aug. 3, 2021 – With only one month left until schools reopen in Ontario, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) is pleased the provincial government's plan includes mandatory indoor masking for students in grades one through 12 and improving ventilation systems. These measures meet some of RNAO's long-standing recommendations to Premier Ford, including those in the association's July 28 [open letter](#). "The measures are essential to minimize the impact of a fourth wave of COVID-19 as Ontario opens school doors to students and staff," says RNAO CEO Dr. Doris Grinspun.

"Although RNAO is pleased to see a paragraph dedicated to vaccination in the government's plan, it's just that – a paragraph," says Grinspun, adding that "given how effective vaccines are in the face of the highly transmissible Delta variant and the emerging Lambda variant, nurses will continue to insist on mandatory vaccination for all educational staff (and health-care workers), unless they have a medical exemption." RNAO joins Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Kieran Moore in urging school boards to work with public health units to promote vaccination uptake, and "we will support the move if school boards (and health-care organizations) make it mandatory," emphasizes Grinspun.

"The association also stresses the importance of requiring masks for kindergarten kids, and hopes the government will modify its strategy to reflect this," says RNAO president Morgan Hoffarth. "The plan also fails to specify physical distancing requirements in schools other than among separate cohorts," adds Hoffarth. "While we are delighted music classes are back, we caution against the resumption of indoor choir practices given what we know about aerosol transmission of the virus."

The government plan does outline ongoing mental health support for students but provides no concrete plan for this to be achieved. We call on Dr. Moore to permanently employ the 625 public health nurse positions across Ontario schools, as well as the additional 50 community wellness nurses to serve First Nations communities.

Nurses join students and parents in celebrating a back-to-the-classroom September, but additional measures are necessary to ensure a safe return for staff, students and their families to keep the learning experience positive amid an ongoing pandemic.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) is the professional association representing registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and nursing students in Ontario. Since 1925, RNAO has advocated for healthy public policy, promoted excellence in nursing practice, increased nurses' contribution to shaping the health system, and influenced decisions that affect nurses and the public they serve. For more information about RNAO, visit [RNAO.ca](https://rnao.ca) or follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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