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## SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

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November 23, 2022

Dr. Mark Joffe  
Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Via email: [mark.joffe@gov.ab.ca](mailto:mark.joffe@gov.ab.ca)

Dear Dr. Joffe:

**Requests re: mitigating respiratory illness for students, staff and families**

Welcome to your new role as the Chief Medical Officer of Health and thank you for taking on this role during a challenging time. The Edmonton Public School Division looks forward to developing a collaborative working relationship with you as we strive to ensure the health and safety of students and staff across our 213 schools in the community.

As Trustees of the public school system, our division seeks your partnership and guidance around the strategies and actions that should be taken to best support the health and well-being of students in the school environment during times of increased risk of illness.

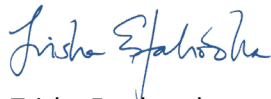
Since September, we have had unprecedented and very high rates of absence in our schools due to the presence of COVID-19, influenza, Respiratory syncytial virus or RSV, and other respiratory viruses. The week of November 7, over 13 per cent of Division students were absent due to illness. That is over 13,500 students - the equivalent of 50 average size elementary schools. It is little wonder that hospital emergency room wait times are [ballooning](#). We are concerned that the wait times for children to be seen in hospitals remains high and that the overall pressure on our healthcare system is increasing. We are fielding pleas from parents looking for further interventions, such as mandatory isolation periods and masking requirements. Past experiences would suggest that masking during outbreak periods in schools can contribute to easing the strain our healthcare system is facing.

We are not health experts, so we look to your office and Alberta Health Services for guidance to support the safe operations of schools during high rates of illness or outbreak status. Throughout the pandemic, we have relied upon and followed the advice of health officials. We recognize that the pandemic is not over and as such would value further information around how the province is monitoring the rate of illness in schools, what targets around rates of illness would trigger action, including a potential mask mandate, and direction related to the operations of schools and what those potential actions may be.

We appreciated hearing you [explain](#) that wearing a well-fitting, high-quality mask can help reduce the risk of becoming sick and help protect others from being exposed and appreciate that you reiterated this point in the letter you have asked all school divisions to send home to parents. We have seen that masks work and are an effective way to mitigate the spread of air-borne illnesses.

We, along with our administration, would like to meet with you, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health at your earliest convenience to discuss how we can work together most effectively for the health of the students we serve, our staff and the broader community.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks  
Board Chair

- c. Hon. Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Education  
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