



Active COVID-19 Screening in the School System FAQ

Question 1) What should we do if we cannot contact the parent or legal guardian of a student to carry out an active COVID-19 Screen? At the moment we are not seeing the students, but we are getting concerned about the students who are missing out on speech language pathology or audiology services in the school boards.

Answer: Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health in [Directive #2 for Health Care Providers](#) requires all health professionals to carry out an active COVID-19 screen with a patient or family member before each time that patient receives in-person health services.

Rationale for Active COVID-19 Screen in the school system

SLPs and audiologists in the school system typically withdraw students from the classroom for services. There is an inherent increased risk of transmission of COVID-19 that occurs beyond the classroom context, and this needs to be explained to parents and guardians.

Risks include:

- SLPs and audiologists working in the school system are itinerant and may be travelling to several schools during a day and potentially providing services to students from different cohorts
- Students are withdrawn from the classroom to a different room with unknown ventilation
- SLPs and audiologists will be providing healthcare that includes:
 - Breaking the physical barrier between the SLP or audiologist and student
 - Removal of the student's mask to allow the SLP to view the student's mouth, lips, tongue, soft palate
 - Touching the student's face and mouth, with the appropriate PPE, to carry out an oral motor mechanism assessment
 - Removal of the SLP's medical mask, while wearing a clear mask or face shield, for the student to see the SLP's face and mouth modeling correct movement patterns for speech
 - Removal of the audiologist's medical mask, while wearing a clear mask or face shield, for a hearing-impaired student to see the audiologist's face and mouth for lip reading

Strategies You Must Employ:

We appreciate that at times it may be difficult to contact parents, or parents may not always provide the SLP or audiologist with evidence of the COVID-19 screen. The Ministry of Health has confirmed that parents can email or text SLPs or audiologists with the screen results or communicate that there are no changes in the student's health status, or they can leave a

message on work voice mail confirming that the screen has been completed and there are no changes in health status.

If these additional forms of communication are not consistently working, consider the following strategies:

- Complete the active COVID-19 screen with students who understand the questions and appreciate the consequences of providing accurate responses. Document the results of the screen and that the student completed and understood the screen.

If the student is too young, does not understand the language of the COVID-19 screen, or is unable to engage in the screen due to the nature of their disability:

- Make and document best efforts to contact parents or guardians to complete the active COVID-19 screen.
- Discuss the issue with school personnel (classroom or resource teachers or the school principal) to establish the best way to communicate with parents and guardians. Document these discussions in the patient record.
- Adapt services and provide virtual care or consider whether services provided within the classroom wearing required PPE (e.g. classroom observations, treatment, consultation to the teacher) is sufficient in the short term.

If you determine that direct, in-person service on a withdrawal basis is required, but you are unable to obtain an active COVID-19 screen for that student:

- Carefully monitor the incidence of the COVID-19 virus at the student's school and in the community to determine the risks versus the benefits of withdrawing the student without a completed active COVID-19 screen.
- Complete a thorough point of care risk assessment (PCRA), which can include briefly observing the student in the classroom for health symptoms and to determine the student's ability to maintain physical distance. Ask relevant school personnel about the student's apparent health symptoms and behaviour that day. Assess the physical space in which you will be working to decide if it allows you to follow all necessary precautions regarding ventilation and physical distancing.
- Withdraw the student and provide in-person services wearing appropriate PPE, maintain physical distance, carry out hand hygiene and disinfect all equipment and workspace used.
- Each time you withdraw a student without obtaining an active COVID-19 screen you must document your rationale for seeing the student, that you have complied with the above steps and include a description of what was completed for your PCRA.

These strategies must be used on a case by case basis and documented in the patient record. If you could not contact the parents on one occasion to complete the COVID-19 screen, this does not mean that you do not try to contact them again. You must attempt to obtain an active screen each time you withdraw a student for direct, in-person service.

Balance the safety of the student, yourself, and the community with providing health care services to students who are in significant need.