



Understanding COVID-19 Symptoms in JK-12 Students

March 25, 2021

Students can present with COVID-19 symptoms for many reasons. While schools are not asked to do a full assessment of each COVID-19 symptom a student may have, there are some considerations. To help you determine which COVID-19 symptoms may require COVID-19 testing, consider the following:

COVID-19 Symptom List:

Does the student have one or more of the following new or worsening symptoms?



Fever > 37.8°C



Cough



Difficulty breathing



Loss of taste or smell



Feeling unwell, muscle aches or tired



Stuffy or runny nose



Headache



Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea



Sore throat or pain swallowing

If a student has any of the above new or worsening symptoms, not related to other known causes or conditions they already have, they should stay home and arrange to get tested.

Consider the following for each symptom:



Fever > 37.8°C

Temperature of 37.8 degrees Celsius/100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher.



Cough

Continuous or barking cough that is more than usual, or that makes a whistling noise when breathing. Not related to asthma, post-infectious reactive airways, or other known conditions they already have.



Difficulty breathing (short of breath)

Out of breath, unable to breathe deeply. Not related to asthma or other known respiratory conditions they already have.



Decrease or loss of taste or smell

Not related to seasonal allergies, neurological disorders, or other known conditions they already have.



Feeling unwell, muscle aches, tired

Unusual or extreme fatigue, muscle aches or lack of energy. Not related to depression, insomnia, thyroid dysfunction, sudden injury, or other known conditions they already have. Feeling generally unwell and unable to participate in activities of school.



Runny or stuffy/congested nose

Not related to seasonal allergies, being outside in cold weather, or other known conditions they already have. If the student is diagnosed with seasonal allergies, and the symptoms are worsening, consider testing.



Headache

Unusual, long-lasting. Not related to tension-type headaches, chronic migraines, not eating or computer use (i.e. gets better with food or glasses).



Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea

Not related to irritable bowel syndrome, anxiety, menstrual cramps, or other known conditions they already have. A stomach ache on its own is not a COVID-19 symptom.



Sore throat or difficulty swallowing

Painful swallowing. Not related to seasonal allergies, acid reflux, or other known conditions they already have.





What is an alternative diagnosis?

There are many reasons students may have symptoms that are not related to COVID-19, including seasonal allergies, asthma, etc. Students who have a history of related or know causes of symptoms for conditions they already have can seek an alternative diagnosis from a medical doctor or nurse practitioner. The alternative diagnosis will confirm that they do not have COVID-19, but another condition that explains the student's symptoms.

If the student has a chronic health condition and symptoms are "worsening," testing is recommended.



What is not an alternative diagnosis?

- Medical notes only indicating that the student has one of the symptoms, but that it is not COVID-19 (e.g. student does not have COVID-19, but has diarrhea or a sore throat).
- Medical notes indicating that symptoms have improved and the student can return to school without diagnosing a condition not related to COVID-19 (e.g. student had diarrhea, symptoms have improved and they can return to school).
- New colds or respiratory illnesses (flu, bronchitis or pneumonia) that present with similar symptoms to COVID-19. An alternative diagnosis cannot be made for an infectious respiratory condition or a cold without a negative COVID-19 test. A cold is not an alternative diagnosis because cold symptoms could indicate COVID-19. It is advised that these individuals are tested.



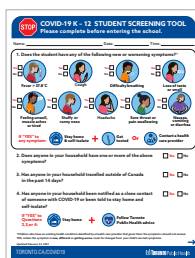
Back to School Confirmation Form

Parents can complete and submit a [Back to School Confirmation Form](#) to the school to confirm that the child is safe to return to school. Toronto Public Health does not recommend the use of doctor notes for return to school.



For more information, please review:

[Screening Questionnaire for JK-12 School Students](#)



[COVID-19 Decision Tool for School Students](#)

