



**Frequently Asked Questions About Returning to School for
Children (<18 years old) with Kidney Disease (including Patients on Dialysis and
Immunosuppression & Kidney Transplant Recipients) during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

School closures were a reasonable early pandemic response, but current evidence and experience support the concept that children can return to school in a manner that maximizes their health and minimizes risks from a public health perspective. We believe that education is critical for the development of children, a human right and is essential for the future wellbeing of our society. The safe return to school is also critical for the social, developmental and mental health needs of our children.

As the school year is due to restart soon, many of you have questions about returning to school while the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is ongoing. While the risk of getting COVID-19 in school is not zero when COVID-19 cases continue to circulate in the community, we would like to provide you with information based on currently available evidence, to help you make informed decisions about school attendance for you/your child who has kidney disease. When reviewing this document, it is important to remember that:

1. There are currently many unknowns about COVID-19 and new information continues to be learnt. Therefore, we will follow-up with newer, revised information as we learn more.
2. The Ministry of Education, with input from key stakeholders including the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, public health authorities, teachers, principals, other school-related authorities, parents and children, will ultimately decide about when and how to safely return to school this fall.
3. These recommendations may not apply to every child's situation and are not meant to replace specific advice that may apply to you/your child.

While we hope that this document will be helpful, please feel free to discuss specific individual details regarding your school plans with us.

SUMMARY OF GUIDANCE

Children (< 18 years old):

- are less likely to be infected with COVID-19 than adults.
- majority of children with COVID-19 have mild illness.

Children (< 18 years of age) with any kidney disease have the same risk of COVID-19 infection as healthy children.

* some children may have increased risk of severe respiratory infections (incl. COVID-19) (refer to page 5 & guidance from your kidney team)

What can EVERYONE do to minimize the risk of infection and severe illness for children with kidney disease during the COVID-19 pandemic?

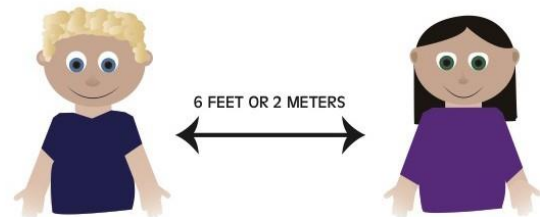
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CLEAN WORK SURFACES FREQUENTLY

ENSURE ADEQUATE PERSONAL SUPPLY OF HAND SANITIZER, FACE MASKS & DISINFECTANT WIPES

FOLLOW ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH & SCHOOL GUIDELINES:

[Ontario Government website: COVID-19 - Stop the spread](#)

[Ontario Government's Guide to reopening Ontario schools](#)

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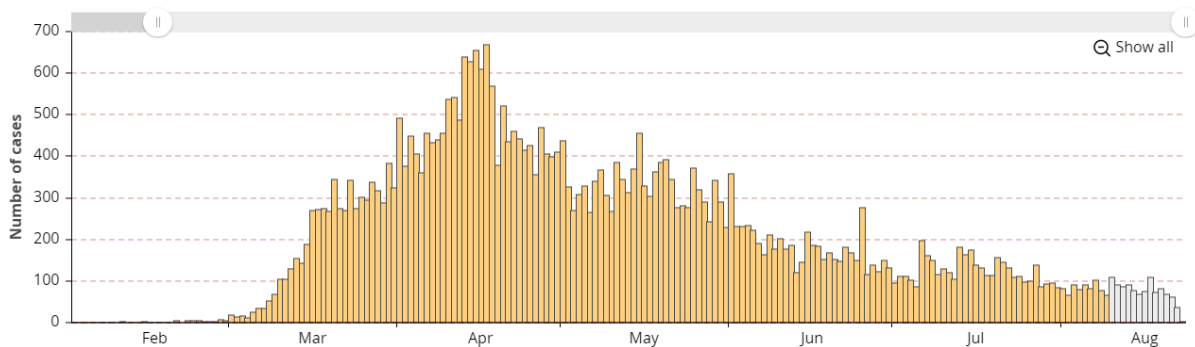
Are children (< 18 years old), including those with kidney disease at higher risk of developing COVID-19 illness?

Children of all ages can get COVID-19, but most children have milder disease than adults. There are no data to suggest that children with kidney diseases are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 if they get exposed to SARS-CoV-2. The factors for considering the risk of COVID-19 for children, including those with kidney disease include:

A. The likelihood of being exposed to a person infected with COVID-19

The likelihood of being exposed to someone infected with COVID-19 depends on the number of active cases in the community. While this likelihood differs in different parts of Ontario, the number of active COVID-19 cases have steadily declined in Ontario since the peak of the pandemic in April 2020.

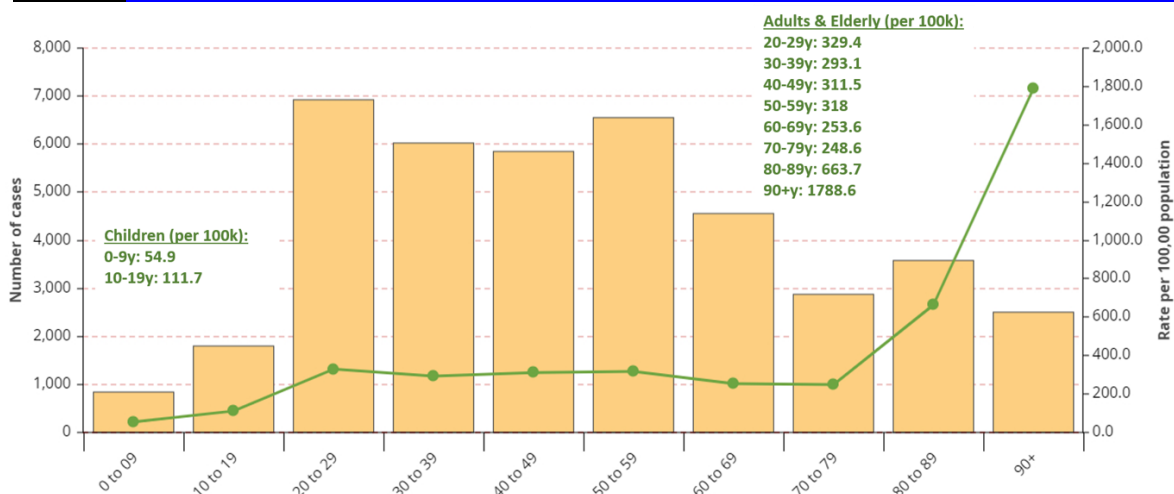
COVID-19 cases in Ontario
(source: [Public Health Ontario: COVID-19 Data and Surveillance](#), accessed August 25, 2020)



B. The risk of developing severe COVID-19 if they get infected

1. Children are **less likely** than adults to have COVID-19. The rates of infection in Ontario for children (19 years and below) are 5 times lower than for adults (20 years and above) [source: [Public Health Ontario: Epidemiological summary of COVID-19 infection in children \(Jan 15-Jul 13, 2020\)](#)].

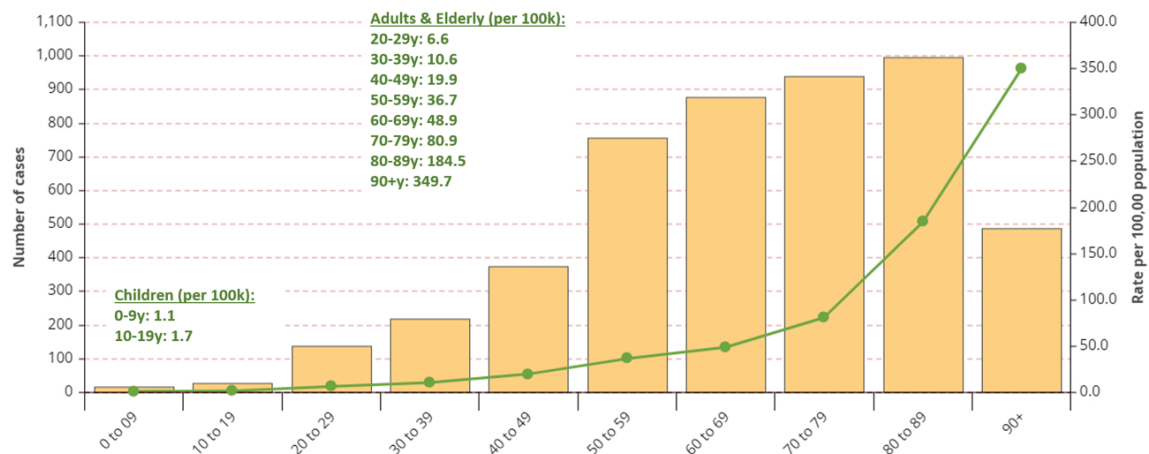
Counts & rates of COVID-19 cases by age group in Ontario
(source: [Public Health Ontario: COVID-19 Data and Surveillance](#), accessed August 25, 2020)



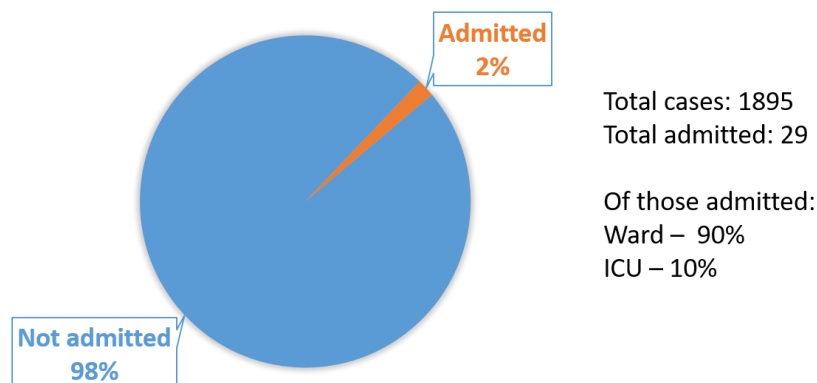
2. **Very few children were admitted to hospital because of COVID-19.** The majority of cases were mild.

Counts & rates of COVID-19 hospitalizations by age group in Ontario

(source: [Public Health Ontario: COVID-19 Data and Surveillance](#), accessed August 25, 2020)



COVID-19 in children 19 years and younger in Ontario (Jan 15-Jul 13, 2020)



source: [Public Health Ontario: Epidemiological summary of COVID-19 infection in children \(Jan 15-Jul 13, 2020\)](#)

3. There have been **even fewer children (<18 years old) with kidney diseases (including those on immunosuppressive medications and those with kidney transplants) who have had COVID-19 in Ontario.** To date, no child (<18 years old) with kidney disease had been admitted to the intensive care unit or died from COVID-19 in Ontario.

Across the world, few children with kidney diseases were diagnosed with COVID-19. The majority of those who were diagnosed with COVID-19 had mild disease. Studies to date have suggested that children with kidney disease (even those on immunosuppressive medications and kidney transplants) are not at increased risks of getting COVID-19 when compared to healthy children.

Summary:

- Since there are now very few new COVID-19 infections in Ontario, the chance of being exposed to someone infected with COVID-19 is very low (but not zero)
- Current evidence suggests that children (<18 years old) with any kidney disease have the same risk of COVID-19 infection as other healthy children.
- Current evidence also suggests that the treatments used for kidney disease do not increase the risk or severity of COVID-19 infection in children (for example, steroids, dialysis, or medications used for transplantation).

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Are the symptoms of COVID-19 in children with kidney disease similar to those in other children?

Yes. In fact, many children have no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they most often include fever, cough, sore throat, and/or diarrhoea.

Are there some children with kidney disease that may have a higher risk of developing severe COVID-19 infection that would justify home schooling?

There is no single right answer that applies to all children, for all situations. Our general advice is that if your child attended school normally before COVID-19, then home schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic is not necessary. The final decision also depends on the number of active COVID-19 cases in your school and community, in combination with specific details about you/your child.

We are using our experience with other common respiratory illnesses that affect children to guide our decision. These include viruses such as influenza A (the “flu”) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Your kidney team will help you decide if your child is at increased risk. Below, we list the factors that increase the risk of infection with all respiratory viruses, including COVID-19:

- **Receiving high level of immunosuppressive medications for active disease:**
 - Recent kidney transplant – within first 6 months immediately after transplant
 - Within 3 months of treatment for acute rejection of kidney transplant
 - Within 6 months of receiving anti-thymocyte globulin
 - Currently receiving high-dose steroids of 20mg/day (30mg/m²/day) or more AND currently receiving or within 3 months of receiving cyclophosphamide or rituximab
- **Have concurrent conditions that further weakens the immune system:**
 - Primary immunodeficiency
 - Undergoing treatment for cancer
- **Have concurrent conditions that may suggest a weakened immune system:**
 - Severely low lymphocyte count
 - Currently have other active viral illness such as cytomegalovirus (CMV)
- **Have unstable, severe or multiple other medical conditions:**
 - Severe obesity
 - Diabetes mellitus
 - Chronic lung/heart disease
 - Neurologic and neurodevelopmental conditions
 - Rheumatologic disease
 - Inflammatory bowel disease
 - Inherited metabolic disorders
 - Severe blood, liver, or kidney disorders

Other considerations:

- **Your kidney team has determined with you that you/your child is at increased risk**
- If the level of COVID-19 activity in your community is **high** (as defined by Public Health). This would typically be announced publicly with details published on their website: [How Ontario is responding to COVID-19](#)
- If your child is awaiting urgent major surgery
- If there is someone else in your house who may be considered ‘high risk’ for developing severe COVID-19

Can a sibling of a child with kidney disease return to school?

Siblings are encouraged to return to school with infection prevention measures (face masks or coverings, physical distancing, proper hand hygiene) practiced and reinforced, as per public health guidelines.

What can be done to reduce the risk of getting or transmitting viral infections when at school?

Parents should actively seek specific information about what their school plans to do to limit the risk of infection during school hours.

In Ontario, the strategies include:

- Screening to exclude individuals who are ill
- Physical distancing in the classroom, lunch area or any other enclosed room
- Regular hand washing throughout the day
- Use of a non-medical mask

Your school should provide you with the specific measures that will be used to reduce risk in your child's classroom. You can get additional information from the Ontario Government website by following this link: [Ontario Government's Guide to reopening Ontario schools](#)

Parents are also strongly encouraged to provide their children with disinfectant wipes so they can frequently clean their desk, chair, stationery, and locker.

We strongly recommend that all children should receive the influenza vaccine, if there is no contraindication.

A great way to teach children about safe practice behaviors is to have parents and older siblings show by example. Children will learn how to maintain physical distancing, wear a face mask, perform frequent hand washing and practice good cough/sneeze etiquette. The goal is for these routine measures to become their new 'normal'.

What should we do if there is a confirmed COVID-19 case in my child's school or in their class? Your school and Public Health will provide you with guidance on what to do. If they determine that your child was exposed to a COVID-19 case at school, it is likely that COVID-19 testing and/or self-isolation will be advised. They will also tell you what the other family members should do.

What should I do if my child was exposed to someone with COVID-19?

- Do not send them to school
- Find out how to get your child tested for COVID-19 in your local community: [COVID-19 assessment centre locations in Ontario](#)
- Contact your doctor or public health unit to alert them of the exposure and discuss next steps. With the guidance of public health, you/your child may have to stay home and self-isolate for 14 days after the last contact with the person with COVID-19
- Watch for symptoms - should symptoms develop, contact us

What should I do if my child develops symptoms that could be due to COVID-19?

- **Do not send them to school – stay home and self-isolate**
- Find out how to get your child tested in your local community
- Contact public health to discuss next steps
- Contact us to determine if your child should be assessed further

What can EVERYONE do to minimize the risk of infection and severe illness for children with kidney disease during the COVID-19 pandemic?

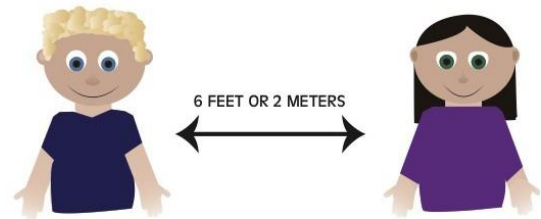
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A way of protecting vulnerable persons from respiratory viral infections, is to create a protective ring around them. In this way, family members and close household contacts should make an effort to ensure that they comply with COVID-19 prevention strategies and get all their recommended immunizations (including the seasonal influenza vaccine), in order to reduce the chances of transmission of infection to the vulnerable child.

Useful links with up-to-date information:

[Ontario Government's Guide to reopening Ontario schools](#)

[SickKids COVID-19 Guidance for School Reopening \(Updated July 29, 2020\)](#)

[Canadian Paediatric Society statement on safe return to school for Canadian children](#)

[Ontario COVID-19 information](#)

[Public Health Ontario: COVID-19 Data and Surveillance](#)

[Government of Canada COVID-19 information](#)

[Canadian Paediatric Society Information – COVID-19 and your child](#)

[Canadian Society of Transplantation COVID-19 information](#)

[American Society of Transplantation COVID-19 information](#)