



Sioux Lookout
First Nations
Health Authority

Dear Education Directors and Principals,

On March 13, 2020, schools across Ontario closed their doors without us knowing when they would reopen. Almost six months later, school doors are beginning to re-open to welcome students back for the 2020-2021 school year. These last 6 months have been marked with uncertainty, personal and economic sacrifice, and ultimately, with success in flattening the curve of the first wave of COVID-19 in our area.

With schools reopening, many are experiencing mixed emotions. Families, educators and support staff, and students young and old, and community leadership, may all feel a combination of relief, fear, pride, worry, and excitement. We all share in this experience, and all our varied emotions are valid. We also all share a common aim—our unwavering commitment to protect our students and our entire school community from COVID-19.

As Directors of Education and principals working for First Nations communities, we want to let you know that we at Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority (SLFNHA) share your commitment and determination to create COVID-safe schools for all. Approaches to Community Wellbeing at the Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority will work with you to support the wellbeing of your students in this difficult time. Our Raising our Children team can support your return to school planning and provide health education to your students. Our Preventing Chronic Diseases team can support adapting your food and nutrition programming to meet new safety standards, and to support your students in mental wellbeing. Our Preventing Infectious Diseases team can support infection prevention and control education and will work quickly with you to respond and prevent the spread of infection if there is a case in your community or school.

We are all in this together, and we all need to know and follow the basic rules for safe schools. We are learning and adapting together as our journey now takes us to the first ever modern-day school reopening in a global pandemic. Here are some key points to remember:

- 1. The best way to protect schools and support a successful school reopening is to keep COVID-19 out of our communities.** Now, more than ever, we need to recommit to COVID-19 prevention. Follow the guidance set out by SLFNHA and your local pandemic team.
- 2. Make COVID-19 symptom screening part of your daily routine.** Just like brushing your teeth every morning, checking for COVID-19 symptoms and using a COVID-19 self-assessment tool (e.g. <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>), are essential parts of your daily habits. We have created a screening tool for students, which can be found on our website.
- 3. Got symptoms? Stay home!** Now is not the time to “tough it out” when you are under the weather. No one will thank you for showing up to school sick. When in doubt, wait it out—and let your school know!

4. **Have a “plan B”.** Things can change quickly with COVID-19. You know your “plan A”. Have a back-up plan so you can deal with unexpected changes caused by COVID-19 in your school, like needing to stay home and being prepared to move from at school learning to remote /virtual learning.
5. **Stay informed.** SLFNHA posts valuable information on their websites and on social media. SLFNHA provides COVID-19 case information and will notify the Chief if a case is in the community.
6. **Take care of yourself.** You may feel alone as a leader in education or the weight of responsibility rests solely on you. You’re not alone, reach out to SLFNHA, your Tribal Councils, other education organizations, and other schools for support and networking. Remember that you cannot support others if you are not taking care of yourself as well.
7. **Practise kindness, patience, and gratitude**—we are all in this together

To support you in the safe re-opening of schools, we have developed some resources and shared them on our website:

- [Letter to parents](#)
- [FAQ for Back to School for parents](#)
- [Daily Screening Before Going to School](#)
- [COVID-19 Screening poster](#)
- [COVID-19 Public Health School Safety Checklist](#)
- [Meal and Snack Program Public Health Guidance](#)

We have also added some of our health promotion resources (i.e. [Eww, Germs! Handwashing video](#)) and posters that may be helpful. We also have many other resources in our COVID-19 section. We will be sending resources directly to schools as well for you to use. We also have Youth Facilitators who are available to visit your school to support health education.

If you need additional resources, please do not hesitate to reach out. For more information about how to Approaches to Community Wellbeing can support your school, please contact Candi Edwards, Raising our Children Manager - candi.edwards@slfnha.com or 807-737-5190; Emily Paterson, Director of Approaches to Community Wellbeing - emily.paterson@slfnha.com or 807-737-6110; or Youth Facilitators (Ariel Root and Angie Morris) - youth@slfnha.com.

Let’s work together to keep our children safe,

Kind regards,



Dr. John Guilfoyle
Public Health Physician

Approaches to Community Wellbeing, Sioux Lookout First Nations Health Authority
807-737-6120, John.guilfoyle@slfnha.com