

Publicly-funded schools to stay closed for two weeks after March Break

Publicly-funded schools across Ontario will close from March 14 through April 5 due to the impact of COVID-19.

The closure will extend for two weeks beyond March Break.

The announcement was made Thursday by Premier Doug Ford, Health Minister Christine Elliott, and Education Minister Stephen Lecce.

The health and well-being of Ontarians is our government's number one priority. Since we first learned of COVID-19 as an emerging public health issue, Ontario has been diligently monitoring the developing situation to protect the health and well-being of all Ontarians. We have also taken decisive action to ensure the province's health care system is positioned to be ready for any scenario.

Given the latest developments both internationally and here at home, today we are taking further action. Based on advice from Dr. David Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and the experts at the COVID-19 Command Table, the Minister of Education has issued a Ministerial Order to close all publicly funded schools in Ontario for two weeks following March break, in response to the emergence in Ontario of COVID-19. This order was approved by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. This means that Ontario schools have been ordered to remain closed from March 14 through to April 5, 2020.

We recognize the significant impact this decision will have on families, students, schools, as well as the broader community, but this precaution is necessary to keep people safe. Today's steps build on a number of actions our government has taken in recent days to respond to COVID-19, including moving forward with additional public health measures, which include enhanced access to screening, expanding lab-testing capacity, and implementing new initiatives to keep the public and frontline workers safe. We are further setting aside up to \$100 million in contingency funding in the upcoming 2020 budget to address challenges related to COVID-19.

We are further mindful of those who work in other public institutions and buildings. As this situation evolves, Ontario's COVID-19 Command Table is prepared to respond quickly and effectively to any scenario and provide the government with advice on measures to keep the public and frontline workers safe. We are committed to working with partners to keep students safe and we expect to provide further information in the near future.

By Brock Weir