

Hello, Ey Swayel

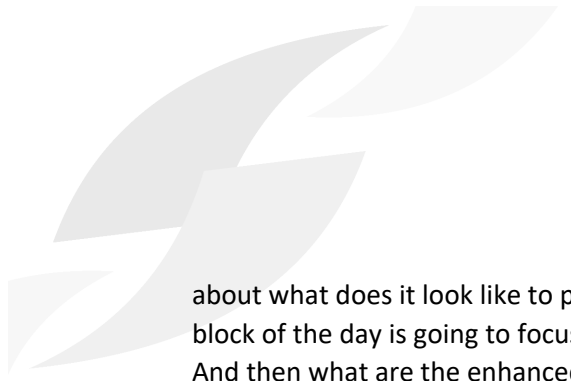
It's good to see you again. I didn't think I would be doing any more COVID videos but here we are once more and next week is upon us and it just won't leave us alone. As you now likely know is that the province has decided to delay the full restart of school until January 10. I just wanted to provide a video with a couple of key pieces of information for you as we head into next week and the weeks beyond. There are three parts that I think about: one is what is omicron? What does it mean for schools, why the need for new orders and what does it mean for things like contact tracing and notifications? Two is what does next week look like for you, for your families, for our staff? Third, provide some clarity on what if we get to a place where we don't have enough staff to run our schools. It's what we call a functional closure. And that's a big part of the planning for next week.

Part one: what is Omicron?

What we know beyond the huge case numbers is that this variant of the virus has a shorter incubation period than previous variants. And the other part of course is it's highly transmissible, much more than the others. The reason that that's very important is that a hallmark, a staple of our managing of COVID over the years, particularly around schools and notifications is has been contact tracing. But contract tracing relies on us be able to be able to search out where is the source, what is the index case, when there has been an exposure. But now with a shorter incubation period and the rapid transmission, contact tracing is being stretched to its absolute limit. In addition to that, with our testing and our facilities that the word is that if you are double vaccinated, and you have symptoms, don't go get tested. Go home, log onto the web, find out what you need to do. Also, we're going to have home rapid tests, so we're losing the ability to find out who is infected and where is that index case. The combination of all these things mean that contact tracing is neither effective nor sustainable considering Omicron, and that means that our whole school notification process is going to be challenged. What we hear often from health is that the virus is changing, and we need to change as well. Our health ministry people are working diligently in terms of what does this mean for notification processes given all these things about Omicron. We will very likely be shifting to something quite different and will have to stay tuned and wait for further information in the week to come.

Part two: what does next week look like both for staff and for community members, and students?

Here we are again with new orders arriving in the middle of a holiday when our staff are away, they're on holidays and some of them likely internationally. Their first day of work is back on Monday in Surrey, and Tuesday for much of the rest of the province. That will be the very first chance for them to sit and digest the new health orders and what it means for them. The new health orders are designed to double down on what we know works for stopping the transmission within school. Many of these enhanced safety measures are things we've seen before. They were things we were doing in September such as limiting gatherings, don't have assemblies, do all meetings online, keep kids apart, use all classroom space to the greatest extent possible, no visitors. I don't think any of these new enhanced measures will be unfamiliar to you and will be things that you know, and our staff just need to review them and talk



about what does it look like to put these into place again. On Monday, when our staff returns, the first block of the day is going to focus around the first message I gave here, what's different with Omicron And then what are the enhanced safety measures and what does that look like for us putting them in place basically right away.

Part three: Functional closures

The bulk of the planning next week is with the explosion of cases and the number of people who are going to be sick, we are anticipating the potential for what we call functional closures. A functional closure is when a school can no longer run because it doesn't have the staff to supervise students or provide instruction. It isn't necessarily an outbreak; it just means we can't run. Almost like a snow day where people can't get to school, and we can't supervise children. In a functional closure, what does that mean for you as a parent and for staff? What it means is we would have an inception day or day zero, where we would find out we don't have enough staff, we can't supervise the students, we can't provide instruction. We would likely be dispersing the students, sending them home, sending home notices to parents, then finding out whether our staff wouldn't be returning in the next day or two or three or five. If all those things are not true and we need to go into closure, then we call a functional closure. We communicate with families; we use the next day for planning and then the day following that will go entirely online. So functional closure for our staff and for families means schools are going online. For how long? We are yet to get clear direction on that, but I believe it will be between seven and 10 days. It takes a lot of planning for staff to pivot on a moment notice to go online for all children. That is really what the bulk of the planning for next week that staff will be doing.

On Monday our staff will be reviewing what's different with Omicron, reviewing our health and safety protocols, and then starting this conversation around how we plan for a functional closure if it should come on any given day.

I hope that gives you a little bit of a preview of the three most important things. There are lots more details to come there are a lot of more unanswered questions and we will be communicating all further in the days ahead. What we do know that's most important right now is that we've been here before. We've learned a lot from similar situations like this and I have absolute faith in our staff that they can do this and do this well and we will be there to support them. The good news, if there is any in all of this, is to date we hear that the outcomes from Omicron appear to be much less severe. While the case numbers are high, hospitalizations in the intensive care and mechanical ventilation numbers seem to be flat or low. Let's keep our fingers crossed that this is really the start of a period that we can once again see through and at the end of the day we won't see very severe outcomes.

Please take care and stay well. Lots more information to come and I hope this helps right now. And expect more communication certainly early next week.

Hy'ce:pka, take care.