



Renfrew County and District Health Unit  
*"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"*

## Memorandum

**Date:** January 14, 2022

**To:** Renfrew County and District Residents

**Re:** Schools, vaccines, and families with school aged children

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Everyone wants schools to reopen as soon as possible, and we want them to stay open. Our children have suffered greatly from the damage of the pandemic. Their education has been inferior, and in many cases, their skills have gone backwards. Their social lives have been curtailed and their mental health jeopardized.

Unfortunately, the vaccination rates do not reflect our enthusiasm for getting children back to school and keeping classrooms safe during this fifth and most infectious wave of the pandemic. While the 12 to 18-year-old age group in Renfrew County and District have a two-dose vaccination rate close to 80%, the first dose rate for the 5–11-year-old group is half of that, at only 40%.

Vaccination is the best way to protect our children and their families, and to ensure our schools remain open. Teachers and school staff are getting boosters at a rapid rate, but they need to reduce their exposure to unvaccinated students if absenteeism and staff shortages are to be avoided. We are a community, and our protection is only as strong as the weakest link in the chain. The weak link is the vaccination rate for the 5–11-year-old age group.

The pediatric dose of the Pfizer vaccine is 1/3 of the dose used for people aged 12 and over. It is extremely safe. By the end of 2021, 8 million doses had been given in the USA with only 11 cases of heart problems, 8 of which had resolved and the rest of which were progressing well.

There were a small percentage of minor problems including a sore arm, fatigue, and fever, all of which resolved quickly. Only one of the 3,300 doses given so far in Renfrew County and District has even been brought to my attention. All to say that for comparison, a drive to the rink on a snowy morning is more dangerous.

Additionally, while children tend not to get very sick with COVID-19, Omicron has landed more children in the hospital than we had previously seen. Heart complications are serious and not uncommon in COVID-19 patients. It must be taken seriously if we are to avoid cases of serious illness and tragedy.

Omicron spreads much more rapidly than Delta. In November and December, schools

were the number one source of outbreaks. Until schools closed before Christmas, the highest rate for cases was in the 5 to 11-year-old age group. Household cases can tie a family down for up to 10-days, keeping kids and parents at home from school and work. Equally, teaching capacity can be reduced if teachers or their families are infected and need to isolate.

In conclusion, school is more important than ever for the many reasons we all know. School protocols can only go so far, and we do not want a repeat of November and December. The best way to protect the schools is to get the entire family vaccinated. The vaccines are effective and safe. Our clinics have availability for everyone who is eligible, and next week, we will be offering vaccines in the schools. I urge you to do your part to protect your loved ones, your schools and your community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RAG', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Dr. Robert Cushman  
Acting Medical Officer of Health  
Renfrew County and District Health Unit