

## WDG schools face extended closures for in-person learning

Written By Sam Odrowski

All Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph schools have been instructed by Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Nicola Mercer to extend online-only learning until Jan. 24, and an announcement from the Province last Thursday extended it to Jan. 25.

During the announcement, Premier Doug Ford said the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario will advise the Ministry of Education on Jan. 20 with which public health units can resume in-person, based on COVID-19 numbers.

“With a significant rise in cases across our region and evidence of transmission among school-aged children, we must make this difficult decision to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and keep our region safe,” said Dr. Mercer in a press release from Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health.

“As parent myself, I know this will be a challenge for many families in the region. Thank you for your continued sacrifices to reduce the threat of COVID-19 to our children and our region. To our teachers, staff, administrators and boards, thank you for continuing to deliver exceptional education during these difficult times.”

Schools in Windsor-Essex, Peel Region, Toronto, York and Hamilton will have distanced learning extended until a minimum of Feb. 10.

New rules that are being implemented for schools across Ontario include masking for Grade 1-3 and requirements for mask wearing outdoors. There's also enhanced screening protocols and targeted testing has been expanded.

“At the heart of our continued efforts to protect against the spread of COVID-19 in our communities is a firm commitment to return kids to school safely,” said Education Minister Stephen Lecce. “Protecting our students, staff and their families is our top priority, and these additional measures build on our comprehensive plan to reopen schools and keep young children in child care safe.”

Despite the closure of all schools, childcare centres for non-school aged children will remain open,

As well, the Province is also implementing new health and safety measures in childcare settings, such as enhanced screening to align with school requirements, voluntary participation in targeted testing and additional infection prevention and control measures to align with schools.

These enhancements are in addition to existing health and safety measures in child care settings across the province. Health officials will determine if school can resume after Jan. 25, closer to the date.