

HEALTH AND SAFETY

SANTÉ ET SÉCURITÉ

Still Wandering in the
COVID-19 Woods
Education workers' concerns and
opportunities

CUPE·SCFP



Today's presentation will cover:

1. Where education staff are approaching the 3rd full school year during the pandemic
2. Why there's a problem
3. How we can start to find our way out of the woods



Wandering in the woods...pitfalls, rolling logs and scorpions, oh my

- Staff and Union have ongoing concerns about repeated infections.
 - Missing work – causes workload issues and stress.
 - With each infection brings an increased risk of post-COVID condition.
 - Elevated risk groups - pregnant women, immunocompromised, previously infected.
 - Workers often feel solely responsible for protecting themselves at work (public health framework) despite occupational health and safety requirements (legislative framework) of workplace parties.
 - In Ontario, the Ministry of Education has not published guidance for school boards to deal with COVID-19, RSV, and influenza for 2023-24.



Wandering in the woods

- Move perceptions about COVID-19 away from a flu-like disease towards a damaging multi-organ disease with a respiratory phase.
- *“To somehow devolve to be a nuisance cold, COVID-19 would need to become a different virus.”* Colin Furness
- Reminding people that it won't go away in the face of no political and public will to do anything about it.
- Poor provincial and local data on infections.
- The actual impact is difficult to assess because the incidence of the disease is not reported or shared with the school community/health and safety committee.

Current plans for reopening school this year:



Outbreaks in Schools

- On average, children will suffer 6-8 upper respiratory infections annually. More prevalent during the school year.
- Schools have historically dealt with outbreaks.
- Many factors
 - Older facilities
 - Poor ventilation
 - Overcrowding – close contact
 - Pressure on students/staff to return from illness despite the possibility of being infectious
- Outbreaks will continue, but that doesn't mean we need to accept the status quo.
- Opportunities to look at controls “along the path” are not always considered.

**Your kids will get sick at school.
Here's what parents need to know**

SANDRA E. MARTIN
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL
PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 16, 2012

This article was published more than 10 years ago. Some information may no longer be current.



This is a problem

- Poor IAQ associated with poor work performance and lower academic achievements.
- Increased risk of disease = increased short/long term disability for staff.
- Schools are already suffering from understaffing.
- Staff may be more sensitive to bringing the disease into the workplace (a good thing). Yet, they know the school community may suffer during their absence.
- Short-staffing = increased risk of workplace violence (delayed response, unmet student needs), stress and burnout.



A reminder...

- OHS legislation requires *“employers and supervisors must take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect the health and safety of workers. This includes protecting workers from hazards posed by infectious diseases.”* (MLITSD).
- It would be incongruent to comply with this legislative requirement while letting uncontrolled respiratory diseases go unchecked and uncontrolled in the workplace.



A lot has been said about ventilation...

- Ontario schools have performed “assessments”
- But we don’t know to what extent rooms are meeting recognized IAQ standards.

School Name	A Y Jackson SS
Ventilation System	Mechanical Ventilation
School Ventilation and Filtration Measures*	
Ventilation assessed	✓
Running ventilation systems longer	✓
Higher grade filters installed	
Increased frequency of filter changes	✓
Increased fresh air intake (windows and/or mechanical ventilation systems)	✓
Standalone HEPA** filter units deployed in portables, as needed	Not Applicable
Standalone HEPA filter units in place	63

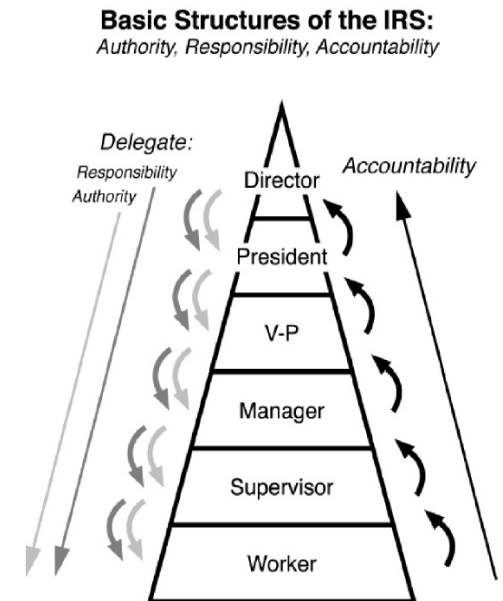
**Some measures may not be feasible within the context of a school facility/site and related building systems.*

***High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA)*



Leadership, accountability and collaboration

- Putting health and safety responsibility on the backs of administration and staff members is the path of least resistance.
- Identify, Assess, Control and **Evaluate** (OHS principles)
- **Find**, **Fix**, **Check**
 - Start measuring and determine where ventilation is poor.
- Collaboration in the school community
 - Joint Health and Safety Committee
 - Staff/Students – means of reporting ventilation problems
 - Parents – awareness and input



Getting out of the woods



- There is a consensus on ventilation
- *“At a minimum, you should ensure that HVAC systems are maintained according to the manufacturer’s instructions. Consider COVID-19 standards for ventilation and HVAC systems, such as those from the CSA Group and the ASHRAE.”*
 - *consider going beyond minimum standards if possible*
 - *carbon dioxide (CO2) sensors may be used to help identify areas with poor ventilation.”* (MLITSD)
- Address historic challenges:
 - Aging facilities – not designed with IAQ in mind
 - Overcrowding
 - Staffing
- Having a better grasp on school ventilation can help in future pandemics and with increased risks from climate change (e.g., wildfire smoke, poor outdoor air quality)





**THANKS
FOR
LISTENING**

Merci
pour
l'écoute

[CUPE - Health and Safety Issues & Research](#)

[CUPE – COVID-19 Health and Safety Practices](#)

