

For Immediate Release  
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## **NLTA SEEKS CLARITY ON OUTBREAK IMPACT AND MANAGEMENT PLANS FOR SCHOOLS**

St. John's...The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association hopes for further clarity soon regarding plans for the management of the COVID-19 B117 variant outbreak in the Eastern Health region, beyond the current two-week "circuit break."

The outbreak, which began with identified cases and transmission among students at Mount Pearl Senior High, has seen many of the new cases confirmed in the region since February 7 reported to be in school-aged individuals. In a letter to all members of the Mount Pearl Senior High school community on February 19, Dr. David Allison, Medical Officer of Health for Eastern Health, stated that many of the outbreak cases are linked to the school, and expressed concern for undiagnosed COVID-19 infections, recommending additional testing for all students and staff. However, other than general age statistics, briefings have provided no information regarding if or the degree to which the outbreak has spread to students or staff of other area schools. With many Mount Pearl Senior High students having siblings and other family members who attend other metro area schools, this is an obvious concern.

"As assessment of the situation and appropriate next steps take place over the days ahead, there should be transparency around the number of schools affected, and the extent of the impact on and source(s) of exposure for students and school staff," said Dean Ingram, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. "I have said before that there is an opportunity to learn from this experience and reconsider what effective public health precautions for schools should look like. To do this requires full disclosure of how all schools have been affected, including what is known about the role of interactions at school and school sponsored activities as sources of transmission."

The NLTA has, since July 2020, been raising concern regarding the public health protocols for schools, questioning the inconsistency between the precautions required for community spaces and other public and private sector workplaces as compared to the lesser measures in place for schools. Since September, many students and school staff have had no choice but to spend extended periods of time in crowded indoor spaces with poor ventilation, little or no physical distancing, and weak or no mask requirements.

"I am encouraged that government protocols on 'COVID-19 Exposure, Case, and Outbreak Management in School Setting' include the enhancement of current measures to prevent transmission, reinforcement of the importance of physical distancing, and stronger mask requirements in the list of potential responses to a school outbreak," said President Ingram. "Schools are where all of our homes, workplaces and community contacts come together. Strengthening protections for students and staff, and by extension their families, should be the focus moving forward. With a significantly more contagious COVID-19 variant now here, stronger measures are needed when in-school classes resume to any degree and in any location, if the goal is as it should be, to maintain this safely for all of our students, staff and broader school communities."