

For Immediate Release
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NLTA RESPONDS TO RESUMPTION OF IN-PERSON CLASSES IN CENTRAL SCHOOLS UNDER ALERT LEVEL 4

St. John's...The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association learned late Wednesday afternoon of the decision to resume regular school operations on Thursday, May 27 for 36 central region schools located in communities currently in Alert Level 4, with confirmed community spread of the COVID-19 B1617.2 variant. According to information shared during yesterday's media briefing, this variant is more easily transmissible than even the B117 variant involved in the metro St. John's outbreak in February, and some already vaccinated individuals may have been infected.

"We have seen correspondence to school communities from NLESD and Dr. Monika Dutt, Medical Officer of Health for Central Health, who states that the Public Health investigation and contact tracing are ongoing with respect to possible community transmission in the region," said Dean Ingram, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. "Dr. Dutt's letter does not indicate if there have been any confirmed cases connected to schools, although this type of information was available during the recent move to and from Alert Level 4 for certain west coast communities. We would certainly like to know more about what role, if any, interactions at school or among students and/or staff have played in this situation and how this, and the science around the B1617.2 virus variant, have been factored into the decisions made. An abundance of caution should always be the rule."

The NLTA has been on record since July 2020 that the Public Health protocols for schools need to be consistent with the precautions required for most community spaces and other public and private sector workplaces. Concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of reliance on student cohorting, particularly in light of substitute teacher shortages in certain areas, and the continued challenges schools face with respect to proper physical distancing and poor ventilation.

"Schools are where all of our homes, workplaces and community contacts come together," said President Ingram. "Schools should not be the weak link in our COVID-19 precautions and those protections need to take into account the evolving situation with highly transmissible variants of concern. We will never know if we did too much, but time will tell the tale of whether or not we did enough."

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