

Ontario educator's post about allowing infectious students to return to class gives voice to widespread outrage

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A report from an educator in Canada on how government isolation guidelines are allowing infectious people to return to school and pass the virus onto others prompted widespread outrage and has been widely shared online. Ken, a teacher in Ontario, posted to Twitter about how a student who tested positive for COVID-19 would be permitted to return to the classroom January 18, just five days after their positive test.

“If this is any indication of how things are going to go, we are in big trouble,” wrote the teacher on Twitter last Friday. “I got informed this morning that a student in my class just got COVID. I was given a heads up that they will be back in class Tuesday. When I raised the concern that the kid is contagious for 10 days, I was told that the guidelines state he can come back after five days. So, I will be in class teaching with a student who I know has COVID and is contagious in a room with 27 other kids.

“To make things worse, I can’t tell any of the kids around him that he has COVID. I will be forced to watch in fear every time his mask slips off his face and he breathes that he is not infecting everyone in the classroom. I will have to just accept that he will infect others.”

Ken’s thread has been retweeted over 130 times and liked by hundreds more educators. Workers responded by sharing their own horror stories. “Work just quotes the guidelines as well, and lets people go maskless at desks etc. even though, well science says COVID moves through air. Really is just part of the bigger plan to get everyone exposed and ill,” wrote one worker.

In comments to the *World Socialist Web Site*, Ken said, “I’ve had a hard time sleeping the past couple of

nights. I’ve been thinking about taking sick days because this individual will be sick in my class. On the other hand, I can’t let my students down. A supply teacher would come in who wouldn’t know that the student is infected.”

Ken’s story is just one among many illustrating the criminal disregard for the health and very lives of educators, support staff, and students shown by governments at all levels across Canada. Schools reopened in four provinces, including Ontario and Quebec, Monday, with virtually no protections to prevent transmission of the potentially deadly virus.

Provincial government guidelines effectively direct schools to create superspreader events by combining classes in groups of up to 50 or 60 to compensate for teacher shortages caused by COVID absences. They also allow untrained parents to be brought in to help “keep an eye” on students, giving the lie to the incessantly repeated claim that reopening schools to in-person learning is about protecting the kids’ right to a quality education.

In fact, the reopening policy is driven by the principle of profits before human life. The political establishment views schools as warehouses where children can be detained so their parents are free to go to work and churn out profits for corporate Canada.

Ken addressed this fact in his post, noting that the reduction of the isolation period to five days had no basis in science and was adopted under pressure from big business. “I’m so conflicted that as a teacher I have the duty to protect my students,” he wrote in his Twitter thread. “But I’m supposed to keep silent and just accept that we all are going to get infected with omicron because of some rule change in isolation times

that the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] made at the behest of a corporation. That decision made in the United States because Delta Airlines needed to keep sick workers on the job has been adopted like gospel by every government in the west to keep workers on the job. In Ontario my school board, and my useless union are following these crazy guidelines that will result in every classroom becoming a superspreader event. The government, public health officials, school boards, and unions are to be congratulated on keeping the pandemic going and serving the interests of the ruling classes. Shame on you all.”

Studies have shown that people infected with COVID-19 can remain contagious for up to 14 days. Even with evidence suggesting that Omicron may have a shorter infection period, scientists have noted that people can remain infectious nine or 10 days after testing positive.

Asked by the WSWs how he feels about being forced back into in-person classes, Ken explained, “Not very good. Up until now, I haven’t felt like I was in danger. But ever since the new variant emerged and we started getting reports about how contagious it was, I got worried. Me and my colleagues watched Omicron rip through South Africa and Europe. We knew it was coming here. Throughout the winter break, all we saw was the numbers going up. There was a lot of stress the week prior to schools opening up, and you can see the stress building as the week went on.”

Ken spoke about the main factors causing concern among his colleagues. “The numbers have not gone down, they have actually gotten far worse,” he commented. “Hospitals are strained. What is increasing stress on everybody is that they will stop counting infections among kids in schools, and stop counting deaths. My feeling is that we are not ready to open schools. They have not put in the measures they promised, such as providing N95 masks and installing HEPA filters. They have not fulfilled their obligations. Schools are not going to be safe when we open for in-person learning.”

Asked what he thought teachers and their supporters should do, Ken replied, “There is nothing normal about what is going to happen this week. The governments want everybody to get infected to keep the economy going. Our unions have left us high and dry, and the

government is willfully pursuing criminal policies.

“We need to join forces, push back, and walk out and refuse to work in unsafe conditions.

“Everybody feels the same way I do. It reflects the sentiments of teachers out there. Teachers are feeling tremendous pressure, we all feel the same. That is why what the CERSC is doing is so important.”

The Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (CERSC) is organizing a public meeting on Sunday, January 23, at 1 p.m. Eastern to discuss the building of a mass movement to force a halt to in-person learning as part of a global strategy to eliminate COVID-19. We encourage everyone interested in learning more about the committee and its program to register today to attend.

We also appeal to educators and other workers to contact us to share your experiences from your workplace during the pandemic. Click here to register and here to contact us.



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