

Educators at York University Call to Protect Students and Workers with Remote Learning, Stronger Campus Protections

TORONTO, ON – Over 350 professors, sessional instructors, teaching assistants, and administrative staff at York University have signed an open letter calling on President Rhonda Lenton to allow educators to opt for remote teaching – to protect their students and the broader campus community.

“York’s ‘safety plans’ fail to account for the heightened danger posed by the reality of the Delta variant,” emphasizes the [open letter](#), which has been endorsed by the York University Faculty Association (YUFA).

“As of 25 August 2021, according to Public Health Ontario data, the 20-29 year age group reported both the highest rates of laboratory-confirmed infection and the highest test positivity rates,” say the authors of the letter.

Toronto university faculty associations and unions have organized an expert panel discussion with public health scientists for Thursday, September 9 at 7pm, to discuss the viability of a fall return for universities across Toronto. Information on this event and the registration link can be [found here](#). This inter-university coalition has endorsed a [Checklist for a Safe Campus Reopening](#).

York University’s plan to move to in-person teaching refuses to acknowledge the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, as infection, hospitalization, and ICU rates continue to climb. Only 63 per cent of Ontarians between the ages of 18 and 29 are fully vaccinated so far; the age group that will be crowding into classrooms without any social distancing restrictions.

“While we all agree that in-person learning is preferable to remote delivery, since mid-March 2020 York’s workers and students have risen to the challenges presented by the pandemic, and the university has continued to be an exceptional centre of learning and research,” the letter’s signatories agree. “It is entirely possible, indeed desirable, to continue to operate remotely until it is actually safe to return to campus.”

The letter calls on York University to grant staff the right to choose the method of course delivery, access to adequate PPE, rapid antigen testing for all members of the campus community, ensure mandatory vaccinations for all those on campus, transparent ventilation audits for each room/building on campus, social distancing restrictions, and proper contact tracing protocols, as well as establish firm case thresholds for the suspension of all in-person activities. Measures must be taken before York University becomes the center of an entirely avoidable COVID-19 outbreak.

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