

Ontario parent speaks out after COVID-19 outbreak at her child's school

Ken Lagerfeld
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The COVID-19 pandemic has placed enormous physical, emotional and psychological strains on the parents and families of school-aged children. Children in Ontario and across Canada are expected to attend school as if there were no pandemic raging out of control in their communities. These children, their mothers, fathers and grandparents have been placed at high risk for contracting the virus and are living in fear of bringing it home to other loved ones and their co-workers in the community.

World Socialist Web Site reporter Ken Lagerfeld spoke last week to Yvonne about her experience having her child sent home due to a COVID-19 outbreak at his elementary school in Brampton, Ontario. A Toronto suburb, with a large working class immigrant population, Brampton and the Peel Region, of which it is part, have emerged as the epicentre of the pandemic in Canada's most populous province. The more infectious and lethal B.1.1.7 variant is running rampant through the region's schools and workplaces, as was recently shown by a massive outbreak at one of Amazon's largest Canadian warehouses.

Ken Lagerfeld: *What was your initial reaction when you learned that your son's school was being closed due to a COVID-19 outbreak?*

Yvonne: My first reaction was shock, to be honest with you. I did not expect a full closure of my son's whole school. But I guess it had to happen—it was a necessary measure that they had to do. I was shocked, concerned and scared at the same time.

This past Sunday, they sent out an email advising that there were four separate COVID cases in four separate classrooms, but the school was not shut down. I did not see that email. My son went to school as usual on Monday, and I was at work. Around 11:00 a.m. I just happened to check my personal email account and saw that the school had sent an email letting us know that the

school was closing because a whole lot of teachers had to isolate and to come pick up our kids ASAP.

So I sent my father, who is 73 years old, to go get my son from school, since I was at work. I am angry that I had to do that because now my father is at risk too, after going into the school, and my elderly mother, too. I did not have time to think about it at the time.

KL: Were you satisfied about how the school notified you? Do you feel you got all the necessary info you needed to feel safe?

Yvonne: Not really. It would have been nice if we had more info and were notified actually how many kids and teachers were sick with COVID, in what classrooms and grades, and when they got it exactly. I only found out that there were cases in my son's friends' classrooms because other mothers told me. The school never told me anything.

I think that we have a right to know. I want to know if my son was close to the infected people in the school. Why didn't they close it on Friday? Parents are only sent a heads-up email that does not tell you anything. What kids are sick? Was my son close to them? With COVID in the school I want to know what I can do to make my son safer, how to react. I am not happy with the lack of information. "Heads up, we have COVID" is not good enough for me.

KL : Which members of your household are most at risk from potential COVID-19 infection?

Yvonne: Given that I am currently living with my parents (my kids' grandparents), they are because of their age group and because they have not yet been vaccinated. I have another son in a high school, and his school has had about 30 COVID cases. It seems like it is spreading more now within the schools in this third wave. I believe schools and day cares should have been closed with the third wave coming.

I know people who teach and also many parents with

kids. I go on the internet, and I am aware of what's happening, and there is more spread from school child to school child. It is spreading more in the elementary schools. The spread is within the school—not brought in. The kids are spreading it to each other. I believe it's the new variants. Yet people are more relaxed about it, (when it should be) more of a concern than ever.

KL: Why do you think that is the case?

Yvonne: Because it has been going on for over a year. It is a different ballgame now because we don't trust the government anymore. This off and on, off and on, closed and opened, lockdown and opened up runaround. The (authorities) are not serious. People are sick of it. If they had done it properly from the beginning, it would be different now. I would blame how the government is handling the pandemic—it starts from there. Of course, opening up the economy has been a big reason, and now indoor dining is about to open again.

I heard about Amazon [being ordered to close] through the news, and the [Brampton] bus routes being canceled as well. I think the media, the corporations and the government are hiding the true state of the pandemic from the people. They don't want us to know. This could have been 100 percent prevented. Amazon does not want you to know they have 500 or 1,000 sick employees. (See: **Canadian health officials shut Amazon warehouse after mass COVID-19 outbreak**)

KL: How could this have been prevented?

Yvonne: For example, with Amazon, a safer work environment. If that building has thousands of employees, why are they all still working? Social distancing, mask wearing. I don't know what happens inside but obviously their practices were not safe. I don't believe they did a good job. Same thing with the bus situation. The bus drivers are not being protected. Are they determining how to safely do work on a crowded bus? How many people can safely get on a bus?

KL: What supports should be available so that workers can be safe at work and if they need to isolate?

Yvonne: Workers should be able to safely isolate, of course! If they need to take time off work, they should be getting some accommodation so they can isolate as long as necessary and get fully paid at the same time. Their expenses should be covered, some sort of sick leave benefit. But (Ontario Premier Doug) Ford has said "No" to that!

At the beginning of the pandemic, I had faith in Doug Ford, but things have changed. I thought in the beginning he was doing a wonderful job. I followed him on

Instagram, but now I am so fed up, I unfollowed him. ... The government just does not know how to handle this. But then I flip flop, you know. Maybe they do.

KL : What do you mean?

Yvonne: Maybe they want it to be like this. Maybe they want it to spread. Maybe they want people to get infected. Maybe they want people to die. Maybe they want to shut down the small businesses and keep the big corporations and the big companies still afloat. We have lost thousands of small businesses since the pandemic began! If you go down to Queen Street, all you see are signs for lease, for lease, for lease everywhere! So we have lost a lot of small businesses, and I think that is what they want. They do not care about workers.

I don't have any confidence in the government and how they handled this pandemic. Absolutely not!

KL: Educators are taking things into their own hands and have formed a Cross-Canada Rank-and-File Safety Committee to stand up and promote safety in the schools. Many staff and teachers feel they must take matters in their own hands because they feel they are not supported by their unions and their school boards. They want to stand up and make the schools safe. Do you think they should do this?

Yvonne: They should do this. ... I would support closing all the schools in Brampton right now because the third wave is going to get worse before it gets better. ... There are way too many cases and transmission at the schools right now. It would be smart to close everything now. Stay home until the summer comes and wait until everyone gets vaccinated. See how things pan out and go back in September. I don't think it's safe for my kids to go back!



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