



2021-2022 HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS: K-12 DISTRICT PLANNING & GUIDELINES

Based upon Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings updated on April 8, 2022, advice from the BC Centre for Disease Control, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, WorkSafe BC and Fraser Health.

UPDATED: April 19, 2022

Important Information – Please Translate

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Key Messages

- Schools continue to be considered low-risk settings for COVID-19 transmission as they are controlled environments, particularly in the context of a highly immunized population.
- Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in schools. Everyone eligible is strongly encouraged to be fully vaccinated (i.e., receive 2 doses and boosters, as appropriate) against COVID-19.
- Local Medical Health Officers may recommend regional prevention measures during times of increased community risk.

This document provides guidance for infection, prevention, and exposure control measures during the 2021-22 school year to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, including COVID-19 within the current context. It also outlines how public health expects to manage COVID-19 cases impacting schools, if and when they occur.

To date, the Ministry of Education has allocated over \$331 million in provincial and federal funding for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years to support the implementation of enhanced health and safety measures and pandemic recovery efforts in public and independent schools. Schools and school districts have utilized these funds, as well as local reserves, to increase the number of hand-hygiene stations in schools, purchase cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment, improve ventilation, hire custodial staff and support remote learning, among other measures.

These guidelines are intended to support K-12 education employees, students, parents, caregivers, administrators and school community members to:

- Be informed about communicable disease measures and how they support a safe school environment
- Understand their roles and responsibilities in maintaining and promoting safe and healthy schools.
- Reduce the risk of workplace transmission of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases, and includes both ongoing measures (e.g., hand hygiene, cleaning) and additional measures to be implemented as advised by public health.

School and district administrators will regularly review their communicable disease plans and should do so with their Site Committees and Joint Health and Safety Committees to address areas where there are identified gaps in implementation.

Public health will continue to review emerging evidence and monitor cases and transmission trends of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases to determine if actions should be taken to prevent or control spread, including updating this guidance.

BCCDC is the primary source of information about COVID-19 in B.C. Resources on the [BCCDC](#) website can be used to support learning and to respond to questions from school communities.

Public Health Measures

Vaccines

Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in schools. Everyone eligible is strongly encouraged to be fully vaccinated (i.e., receive 2 doses and boosters, as appropriate) against COVID-19 to protect themselves and those around them – including those who are not eligible to be vaccinated. All recommended doses are needed to get the most effective protection against serious cases of COVID-19 and provide longer-lasting protection.

The vaccines used in B.C. are highly effective against COVID-19, including among variants of concern. Vaccinated people tend to have milder illness if they get infected and are also less likely spread COVID-19 than unvaccinated people. Up to date information on vaccinations coverage is available from [BCCDC](#).

All children ages 5 and up are currently eligible to be vaccinated, and as such they continue to be less likely to get and spread COVID-19 and have a low risk of serious outcomes if they do get COVID-19. It is strongly recommended that all adults interacting with children be fully vaccinated.

Evidence-based immunization information and tools for B.C. residents are available from [BCCDC](#) and [ImmunizeBC](#).

Public Health Case Management

Public health management practices (including guidance for K-12 school-associated COVID-19 activity) have transitioned to established practices for other circulating viral illnesses with similar transmission characteristics. This includes individual self-management (i.e., individuals care for themselves, engaging with health care providers when needed), with public health focused on identifying and responding to large clusters and outbreaks.

We have moved into a period where families and individuals must self-manage their symptoms, care, and contact tracing when they believe they have been infected with COVID-19. It is essential that families and individuals use the [BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) and inform their close contacts. Health authorities will no longer be providing school exposure notifications and contact tracing information to school districts for distribution. Further, for reasons of privacy protection, schools cannot release individual contact information for the purpose of an individual to notify others – staff, student, or family. Also, the school will not be able to notify others on their behalf.

In K-12 schools, schools will closely monitor school attendance data to determine if they have met a public-health determined potential activity signal over a period of time. When met, the school will notify public health and the school community. Public Health, led by Medical Health Officers, will continue to lead investigations to determine if additional measures are needed. Public health will also monitor provincial and regional data and will connect with schools if they identify further investigation is needed.

Regional Differences and Local Public Health Orders and Recommendations

Medical Health Officers continue to be able to place local public health Orders requiring additional health and safety measures beyond this guidance at their own discretion, based on their authority under provincial legislation. These may be put in place during times of increased community transmission of COVID-19 or other communicable diseases, and within communities with low vaccination uptake. They are based on local epidemiology and are proportional to risk. For schools, the local Medical Health Officer may issue a recommendation for an individual school, a grouping of schools, a school district, for all schools within a health authority region, or some combination thereof, to implement specific additional health and safety measures during times of elevated risk.

Environmental Measures

Cleaning and Disinfection

Regular cleaning and disinfection are essential to preventing the transmission of COVID-19 from contaminated objects and surfaces. Schools should be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with the BCCDC protocols.

This includes general cleaning and disinfecting of the premises at least once every 24 hours.

- Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected once every 24 hours
- These include doorknobs, light switches, water fountains, kitchen appliances, service counters, toilet handles, tables, desks and chairs, keyboards, sports equipment, music equipment, manipulatives and toys used by multiple students.
- Some frequently touched items like toys or manipulatives may not be able to be cleaned often (e.g. fabrics) or at all (e.g. sand, foam, playdough, etc.). These items can continue to be used, if hand hygiene is practiced before and after use.
- There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted via textbooks, paper or other paper-based products. Laminated or glossy paper-based products (e.g., children's books or magazines) and items with plastic covers (e.g., DVDs) can be contaminated if handled by a person with COVID-19; however, the risk is low. There is no need for these items to be cleaned and disinfected or quarantined for any period of time, or for hand hygiene to be practiced before or after use.

Ventilation and Air Exchange

At this time, there is no evidence that a building's ventilation system, in good operating condition, would contribute to the spread of COVID-19. Good indoor ventilation alone cannot protect people from exposure to the virus; however, it may reduce risk when used in addition to other preventative measures.

For activities that take place indoors, application of the basic principles of good indoor air quality should continue, including supplying outdoor air to replenish indoor air by removing and diluting contaminants that naturally occur in indoor settings.

All mechanical heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are designed, operated, and maintained as per standards and specifications for ongoing comfort of workers ([Part 4 of OHS Regulation](#)). Open windows when the weather permits if it doesn't impact the functioning of ventilation systems.

The District has engaged a consultant who has recommended filter upgrades if and where appropriate. With funding provided by the Provincial government, the District will install HEPA filters in spaces without mechanical ventilation. The work will be done on a priority basis.

When using air conditioners and fans in ventilated spaces, air should be moved from high places to lower places instead of blowing air directly from one person's breathing zone to another's. Avoid horizontal cross breezes. Use of portable air conditioners and fans in unventilated spaces with doors and windows closed should be avoided, except when necessary, during high or excessive heat events. Communicable disease prevention measures need to be balanced against other risks, like excessive heat events in warmer months or poor air quality from wildfire smoke.

Administrative Measures

Gathering & Events

Schools can resume all types of gatherings and events including staff only ones, and there are no longer specific disease capacity limits. Visitors should follow a school's communicable disease prevention plan, including person practices.

Space Arrangement

Schools can use classroom and learning environment configurations and activities that best meet learner needs and preferred educational approaches. Taking students outside more often is still encouraged (when the weather allows) due to its overall health benefits.

Health Awareness and Illness Practices

Health Awareness reduces the likelihood of a person with a communicable disease coming to school while infectious. Check that your child does not have symptoms of illness, including if they are unable to participate fully in activities.

Visitors/Community Use

Schools are responsible for ensuring that visitors are aware of communicable disease protocols and requirements, and have completed a daily health check, prior to entering the school.

- Information on communicable disease protocols and requirements for visitors should be posted by the entrance to the school, on the school's website and included in communications to students and families.

Schools can return to routine pick up/drop off practices, though should still consider strategies to prevent crowding at pick-up and drop-off time. Parents/caregivers and other visitors should respect others' personal space while on school grounds, including outside.

After hours community use of facilities is allowed in alignment with other health and safety measures:

- Use must occur in line with those activities permitted as per relevant local, regional, provincial and federal public health recommendations and Orders
- Diligent hand hygiene
- Respiratory etiquette
- Ensuring participants stay home if they are feeling ill
- Where possible, limiting building access to only those areas required for the purpose of the activity

Curriculum, Programs and Activities (including Extracurricular Activities)

All programs and activities should operate in alignment with communicable disease prevention plans.

Transportation

For school buses, schools can return to regular seating and onloading/offloading practices.

Schools should continue to:

- Encourage bus drivers and passengers to practice hand hygiene and before and after trips and to practice respiratory etiquette as needed,
- Spread passengers out if space is available, and
- Open windows when the weather allows.

Schools should encourage methods of active participation. In taking mass transit, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette should be practiced before and after trips, and all should follow the safety guidance by the transit authority.

For carpooling, we ask staff and families to:

- Continue to spread out as much as possible,
- Travel with the same people whenever possible,
- Set the vehicle's ventilation to bring in fresh outside air, and do not recirculate the air,
- Open the windows when the weather allows,
- Clean hands before and after trips, and
- Clean frequently touched surfaces regularly.

Field Trips

When planning field trips, staff should follow existing policies and procedures as well as the guidance in this document. Additional measures specific to field trips should be taken, including:

- Schools should consider guidance provided for overnight camps from BCCDC and the BC Camps Association when planning overnight trips that include group accommodation.
- Schools should make every effort to avoid venue/locations that place additional requirements than could prevent a person from being able to participate, particularly students. If this is not possible (and the field trip/travel cannot occur otherwise), schools can require participants to confirm they are able to meet the additional requirements (e.g., are able to provide proof of vaccination).
- Students and staff may also be required to follow the communicable disease prevention plan of places attended on a field trip. Where there is no conflict with a school's communicable disease prevention plan, the more stringent safety protocols should be followed.

Food Services

Food services (e.g., meal programs, cafeterias, fundraisers, etc.) can return to regular operational and food safety practices. Students involved in food preparation and distribution should be taught and supported to practice relevant food safety practices, including hand hygiene.

Personal Measures

Health Awareness

Everyone at school should practice [health awareness](#), including staying home when sick. For information on what to do when sick, see [Appendix A](#).

Masks and Face Coverings

The decision to wear a mask or face covering is a personal choice for staff, students and visitors. A person's choice should be supported and respected. Refer to Supportive School Environment for more information.

Schools should continue to have non-medical masks on hand for those who have forgotten theirs but would like to wear one, or who become ill at school.

Hand Hygiene

Staff and students should be encouraged to practice hand hygiene upon school entry and before/after breaks and eating, using the washroom and using [frequently touched](#) shared equipment.

Respiratory Etiquette

Staff and students should:

Cough and sneeze into their elbow, sleeve, or a tissue.

Throw away used tissues immediately and perform hand hygiene.

Personal Space

Staff and students should be encouraged to respect others personal space (the distance from which a person feels comfortable being next to another person).

Sharing Food, Beverages and Other Items That Touch The Mouth

Staff and students should be encouraged to not share items that come in contact with the mouth (e.g., food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, vaping devices).

Shared-use items that touch the mouth should be cleaned between use by different individuals (e.g., water bottles, instrument mouth pieces).

Appendix A: Summary - What to Do When Sick

Daily Health Check

Everyone going into to school must complete a daily health check, including staff, visitors, and students. A daily health check means checking yourself or your child for new symptoms of illness, including symptoms of COVID-19.

Symptoms of illness (including COVID-19) include things like:

- Fever or chills
- Difficulty breathing
- Runny nose
- Headache
- Diarrhea
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Sneezing
- Body aches
- Loss of sense of smell or taste
- Loss of appetite
- Extreme fatigue or tiredness
- Nausea or vomiting

If you are sick or feel unwell, stay at home. This is important to stop the spread of illness, including COVID-19, in schools.

You can attend school if:

- Your symptoms are consistent with a previously diagnosed health condition (e.g., seasonal allergies), OR
- You have existing symptoms that have improved to where you feel well enough to return to regular activities,

AND you are not required to self-isolate, or your self-isolation period is over (based on a positive COVID-19 test result, if taken).

What to Do When Sick

If you have mild symptoms of COVID-19, you usually don't need a test. Mild symptoms are symptoms that can be managed at home. Most people don't need testing for COVID-19.

Stay home and away from others (as much as possible) until you feel well enough to return to your regular activities and you no longer have a fever. You should also avoid non-essential visits to higher risk settings such as long term care facilities and gatherings, for another 5 days after ending isolation.

If you have a Rapid Antigen Test at home, use it when you have symptoms. How long you should stay home depends on your test result. Find out more about [Rapid Antigen Test results](#).

If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19, you do not need a test.

If you are unsure about your symptoms, you can use the [Self-Assessment Tool](#), contact your health care provider or call 8-1-1.

Testing may be recommended for some people who may be more likely to get severe disease. See BCCDC for information on [who testing is recommended for](#).

Appendix A: Summary (continued) - What to Do When Sick

What to Do if Someone in Your Household is Sick

You can continue to attend school if someone in your household is sick and/or self-isolating as long as you do not have any symptoms of illness and feel well. This includes if they have tested positive for COVID-19.

Try to stay apart from the person in your household who is sick as much as possible.

Ensure you closely monitor yourself (or your child) for symptoms of illness and stay home if you develop symptoms of illness or feel unwell.

The best way to protect yourself and your family from COVID-19 is to get vaccinated. Vaccines are available for anyone ages 5 and up. Register now at: [Getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca](https://getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca)

If You Test Positive for COVID-19

Your age and vaccination status determine how long you should self-isolate for if you test positive for COVID-19.

Age	Vaccination Status	Guidance
Under 18 years of age	Unvaccinated, partially vaccinated or fully vaccinated	Self-isolate at home for 5 days AND until your symptoms improve and you no longer have a fever. Avoid non-essential visits to higher risk settings like long-term care facilities and gatherings for another 5 days after ending isolation.
18 years of age or older	Fully vaccinated	
	NOT fully vaccinated	Self-isolate at home for 10 days AND until your symptoms improve and you no longer have a fever.

Close contacts, who are usually others in your household, do not need to self-isolate (regardless of vaccination status) but should closely self-monitor for symptoms. BCCDC has more information for [close contacts](#).

Appendix B: Illness Flow Chart

