



2022-2023 COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PROTOCOLS SD43 DISTRICT PLANNING AND GUIDELINES

Based upon Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings updated on April 25, 2022, advice from the BC Centre for Disease Control, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, WorkSafe BC and Fraser Health.

UPDATED: September 1, 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 was developed by the Ministry of Education and Child Care in collaboration with the BC Centre for Disease Control, Indigenous rightsholders and education partners – including teachers, parents, and school leaders. It outlines guidance for K-12 settings for use by boards of education, independent school authorities and schools in communicable disease prevention planning. This document brings together the previously issued Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings, the COVID-19 Protocols for School & District Administrators and Staff: Management of School-Associated Activity and the K-12 Recovery Plan and is aligned with [BC Centre for Disease Control | Ministry of Health Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#).

COVID-19 will continue to circulate in our population, and as long as cases occur within our communities, K-12 students and staff members will continue to be affected. However, BCCDC notes that transmission within K-12 school settings accounts for a minority of COVID-19 cases, even amongst students and staff. Moreover, with high immunization rates in BC and treatment options for people at higher risk of serious disease, public health advises that COVID-19 can be managed as are other serious respiratory infections in the community. As such, the guidance in this document supports reducing the risk of transmission of communicable diseases, including COVID-19 and will be modified as needed. BCCDC is the primary source of information about COVID-19 in BC.

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 will do so with their Site Committees and Joint Health and Safety Committees to address areas where there are identified gaps in implementation.

Communicable Disease Prevention Guidance

Vaccines

BCCDC Guidance

Vaccines are important tools to protect against many serious communicable diseases. Vaccination protects from serious illness due to COVID-19 and is the most effective way to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our communities. All COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada protect against serious complications, including from the omicron variant. It is important to get all recommended vaccine doses to get the most effective protection against serious cases of COVID-19. People 6 months and older are eligible for COVID-19 vaccines. More information about COVID-19 vaccines is available from the BCCDC website. Students and staff are also encouraged to ensure they are up to date on all recommended vaccines for other communicable diseases, including COVID-19 vaccines.

Communicable Disease Prevention Plans

Communicable disease prevention plans focus on reducing the risk of transmission of communicable diseases (including COVID-19). Schools are expected to document and make their plans readily available (e.g., post on school/school district websites, on a bulletin board at the school, etc.). The prevention measures outlined below should be always in place. During times of increased communicable disease risk, public health may recommend additional prevention measures for schools to implement. Communicable disease prevention plans will be updated when temporary additional measures are in place.

WorkSafeBC – Communicable Disease Prevention

School boards and independent school authorities must follow WorkSafeBC communicable disease prevention guidance and must provide communication, training and orientation to ensure the health and safety of their workers. WorkSafeBC communicable disease prevention guidance is aligned with the guidance provided by BCCDC. School districts, independent school authorities and schools will review their communicable disease prevention plans when this guidance is updated, and/or on an annual basis or as circumstances require and should do so with their Site Committees and Joint Health and Safety Committees. Reviews should address areas where there are identified gaps in implementation.

Environmental Measures

Cleaning and Disinfection

Regular cleaning and disinfection are essential to preventing the transmission of Communicable Diseases 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.
- Cleaning and disinfection activities should focus on spaces that have been utilized by staff or students.

Ventilation and Air Exchange

BCCDC Guidance

Continue to ensure 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 the OHS Regulation), and that they are working properly. Open windows when the weather permits if it doesn't impact the functioning of ventilation systems. Taking students outside more often is no longer necessary for communicable disease prevention.

It is important to think of HVAC systems holistically, factoring in both outdoor air supply and filtration. The combination of outdoor air supply and filtration can significantly influence indoor air quality. School districts and independent school authorities should regularly maintain HVAC systems for proper operation. Schools should consider guidance for school ventilation systems offered by ASHRAE. This includes considering:

- Schools with recycled/recirculated air systems should consider upgrading filters to finer grain filters (if possible)
- increasing air exchanges by adjusting the HVAC system
- managing air distribution through building automation control systems
- where possible, opening windows if weather permits and HVAC system function will not be negatively impacted

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.

Natural ventilation (operable windows, etc.) and portable HEPA filter units can be considered in regularly occupied classrooms that do not have mechanical ventilation systems. Use of portable air conditioners and fans in unventilated spaces with doors and windows closed should be avoided, except when necessary (e.g., during high or excessive heat events). Schools are encouraged to use BCCDC resources, including on Heat Event Response Planning and Wildfire Smoke, in planning for excessive heat events, and to consult their local health authority for guidance as needed.

Hand Hygiene

BCCDC Guidance

Rigorous hand washing with plain soap and water or using an effective hand sanitizer reduces the spread of illness. Everyone should practice diligent hand hygiene and schools should facilitate regular opportunities for students and staff to wash their hands.

Schools should:

- Facilitate regular opportunities for hand hygiene:
- This can include using portable hand-washing sites and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers containing at least 60% alcohol
- Schools should use commercial hand sanitizer products that have met Health Canada's requirements and are authorized for sale in Canada
- Ensure hand hygiene supplies are always well stocked including soap, paper towels (or air drier) and where appropriate, alcohol-based hand rub with a minimum of 60% alcohol.
- If hands are visibly soiled, alcohol-based hand sanitizer may not be effective at eliminating microbes. Soap and Water are preferred when hands are visibly dirty. If it is not available, use an alcohol-based hand wipe followed by alcohol-based hand rub.

Respiratory Etiquette

BCCDC Guidance

Parents and staff can teach and reinforce good respiratory etiquette practices among students, including:

- Cough or sneeze into their elbow or a tissue. Throw away used tissues and immediately perform hand hygiene.
- Refrain from touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Refrain from sharing any food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, or vaping devices.

Administrative Measures

Health Awareness

BCCDC Guidance

School administrators should ensure that staff, other adults entering the school, parents, caregivers, and students are aware that they should not come to school if they are sick and unable to participate fully in routine activities. School administrators can support this practice by communicating the importance of everyone doing a health check.

A health check means a person regularly checking to ensure they (or their child) are not experiencing symptoms of illness (including but not limited to COVID-19 symptoms) that would limit their ability to participate fully in regular activities before coming to school to prevent spread of communicable diseases, such as COVID-19, within school settings.

Schools do not need to monitor students or staff for symptoms of illness.

Illness Practices/What To Do When Sick

What To Do When Sick

Staff, students, or other persons who are exhibiting new symptoms of illness (including symptoms of COVID-19 or gastrointestinal illness) should stay home and follow the BCCDC guidance outlined below:

If the person is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms

BCCDC Guidance

The [When to Get Tested for COVID-19 resource](#) or the [B.C. Self-Assessment Tool](#) provides more information on whether you should get a test for COVID-19. Those unsure or concerned about their symptoms should connect with a health care provider or call 8-1-1.

Staff, children, or other persons in the school setting who test positive for COVID-19 should follow the guidance on the [BCCDC website](#) as to how long they should self-isolate. They can return to school when they no longer need to self-isolate as long as symptoms have improved, and they are well enough to participate in regular activities. Schools should not require a health care provider note (e.g., a doctor's note) to confirm the health status of any individual, beyond those required to support medical accommodation as per usual practice.

If the person is experiencing other symptoms, isn't recommended to take a COVID-19 test (most people) or tests negative for COVID-19

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.

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.

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.
- 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.

Personal Measures

Health Awareness

Everyone at school should practice [health awareness](#), including staying home when sick.

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.

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.
- Refrain from touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Refrain from sharing any food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, or vaping devices.

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).