



# Back To School Facts: What you need to know for the return to school 2020-21

## B.C.'s Back to School Plan

**Students in B.C. will return to in-class learning by September 10, 2020.** B.C.'s Back to School Plan includes

- 1** new health and safety measures
- 2** additional funding for protective equipment like masks
- 3** learning groups to reduce contact

These measures are in place to help keep everyone safe in school. School districts and independent schools have communicated with parents their plan for students this year.

## The decision to return to full-time, in-person classes

Plans for a safe return to school have been made based on the recommendation from Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, and other public health experts. Strict public health and safety guidelines have been created to make sure all schools are safe. All boards of education and independent school authorities are required to implement [the Public Health Guidance for K-12 Settings](#). Plans were prepared with the input of educators, parents, support workers, school leaders, trustees, Indigenous communities and public health experts.

Schools support children in developing their potential and acquiring the knowledge, skills and abilities they need for lifelong success. Getting children back into the classroom is essential for their overall health and well-being, emotional development, social growth, and educational needs.

## COVID-19 science & kids

COVID-19 has a very low infection rate in children 19 years and under, and especially low in children under 10. Serological tests have confirmed that in B.C., less than 1% of all children tested have been COVID-19 positive. Children who have developed COVID-19 have most likely acquired it from adults in the household setting. Kids who get COVID-19, usually have milder symptoms, such as a low-grade fever, dry cough, and gastrointestinal issues.

## Health and safety measures

[Health and safety measures](#) create safe school environments and reduce the spread of COVID-19. Safety measures include students and staff staying home when they are sick (no exceptions!), increased cleaning at schools, regular handwashing and/or hand sanitizing, wearing masks in common spaces, keeping a safe distance from others when possible, and keeping students in classrooms and learning groups. Safety measures have been proven to work well in schools because they are controlled environments that have consistent groups of people.



## Stay home when sick

Public health guidelines for schools are firm (see pg.11): if a student, staff member or any other adult has any symptoms of a cold, influenza, COVID-19, or any other infectious respiratory disease, they must not enter the school.



## Daily health screening

Staff and students must do a daily health check. Parents and families should ask these questions before going to school:

- Does your child have the symptoms of a common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease?
- Has your child been outside Canada in the last 14 days?
- Has your child been identified as a close contact of a confirmed case or outbreak?

If the answer is **yes** to any of these questions, you must keep your child at home, keep them isolated, and seek care from a health-care provider. Staff should ask themselves the same questions each day.

## Learning Groups or Cohorts

Learning groups were recommended by the Provincial Health Officer to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19. A learning group is a group of students and staff who remain together throughout the school quarter, semester or year and who primarily interact with each other. Students will remain in their learning group during recess, lunch and break times. It's important to remember that students will spend most of their time in the classroom, with much smaller numbers of people than the learning group maximum.



For example, a learning group could be made up of:

- A single class of students
- Multiple classes that sometimes join together for activities like physical education (PE) or music
- A group of secondary school students with the same courses in the same quarter or semester

For students, learning groups will mean:

- Fewer contacts overall
- Fewer shared spaces and surfaces
- Keeping a safe distance and limiting physical contact
- Regular activities (lunch or recess) with the same group of people
- If someone attending school tests positive for COVID-19, public health officials can quickly identify close contacts and get in touch
- Practicing other safety measures, like regular handwashing

Learning groups provide important benefits for students, including more in-class learning time, increased peer interaction and support, and decreased feelings of isolation.

## Learning group sizes

Learning group sizes will vary depending on school districts and individual schools. The maximum group size is smallest in elementary and middle schools because it is more challenging for younger students to maintain physical distance.



Students in secondary school are better able to minimize physical contact, clean their hands, and recognize if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Learning groups can also include staff like teachers, specialist support staff, and Education Assistants (EAs).

- **Elementary:** 60
- **Middle:** 60
- **Secondary:** 120

## What happens if there's a student or staff who tests positive for COVID-19?

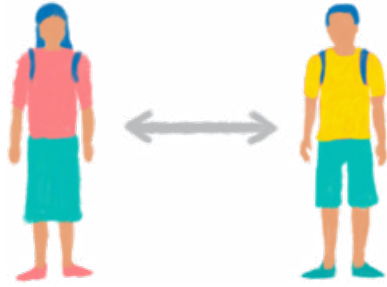
If a student or staff shows any symptoms of COVID-19 while at school, they will be supervised and cared for in a separate room and returned home as soon as possible. The individual will need to be assessed by a health-care provider. If COVID-19 is confirmed, public health will notify the school and district. They will then identify any potential

COVID-19 exposures and reach out to anyone who may have been exposed. Parents/guardians will be notified if their child has been in contact with a COVID-19 positive person. If that happens, your child is required to isolate for 14 days. Public health officials will work closely with the school to determine if further actions should be taken. The school will support student learning while they are in self-isolation.

## Keeping a safe distance

Students and staff are encouraged to maintain a safe distance from others in school. In classrooms, students will be given as much space as possible.

Students and teachers in learning groups are not required to stay two metres apart, but physical contact will be limited. Schools can help reduce contacts in different ways, like staggering breaks and transition times; incorporating individual activities; reminding students to keep their hands and personal belongings (food, art supplies, etc.) to themselves.



## Wearing masks at school

Masks will be required for all middle and secondary students, teachers, and staff in the following circumstances:

- 1** on buses
- 2** in common areas like hallways
- 3** outside the classroom or learning groups when you can't maintain a safe distance.



People who cannot wear masks for medical reasons will not be required to wear one. Students and staff will each be provided with two reusable masks. Everyone will be required to keep a safe distance and wash hands regularly. Everyone must treat people wearing masks, and those who cannot for medical reasons, with respect.

## Students with additional needs

Parents of students who are immune-compromised or have underlying medical conditions are encouraged to consult with their health-care provider to determine their level of risk regarding return to school. If a medical professional determines that a student cannot attend school due to their health risks, the school district will work with the family to review alternative learning options for the student.

Students with disabilities, diverse abilities or those who require additional supports will have access to and receive the same supports and services they had prior to the pandemic.

## School buses

Public health measures have been implemented to keep school buses clean and safe. Students should clean their hands before and after riding the school bus. Buses will be loaded to reduce contact and students in middle school and high school will be required to wear a mask on the school bus. Buses will be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

## Options for learning

Parents of K-12 students have options for their kids' education for September 2020:

- 1** In-class instruction: Students attend their regular school in learning groups
- 2** Online & distributed learning: Students can connect online with a teacher for a course, term, or all year through a public or independent school.
- 3** Homeschooling: Students can register for education outside of a school environment with the parent or guardian responsible for delivering an education program.

The Ministry of Education has also given school districts the flexibility to find options that work for families who are not ready to have their child attend their local school at the beginning of the school year, but who want a continued connection to the school

This flexibility includes the authority for all school boards to offer remote options to students within their districts and the tools districts need to modify their existing programs to meet demand.



Stay Informed Via These Resources:  
[www.gov.bc.ca/COVID-19](http://www.gov.bc.ca/COVID-19) | [www.bccdc.ca](http://www.bccdc.ca) | **1-888-COVID19**  
Symptom Self-Assessment: [covid19.thrive.health](http://covid19.thrive.health)

