

## Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools

UPDATED: March 10, 2022

### Introduction

This document provides guidance for educators, administrators, and support staff (hereafter referred to as staff) at public, independent, and First Nations Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) schools of what communicable disease prevention measures should be implemented as of the above date during the 2021-22 school year to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, including COVID-19.

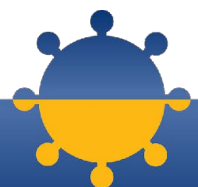
COVID-19 will continue to circulate in our population, including within K-12 school settings; however, with high immunization rates in BC, as well as emerging treatment options for people at higher risk of serious disease, we can transition to managing COVID-19 as we do other serious respiratory infections in the community. Public health continues to review emerging evidence and monitor cases and transmission trends of COVID-19 to determine if actions should be taken to prevent COVID-19. Guidance will continue to be modified as needed as we transition from emergency response to the pandemic to the recovery and readiness phases in the next few months.

The Ministry of Health and BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) fully respect the authority of individual First Nations to make decisions about the operation of First Nations schools in the best interests of their students, schools, and communities. This includes their authority to decide if and how to use this guidance to inform planning and if and how to reopen their schools. The Ministry of Education works with Indigenous rights holders and K-12 education and health partners to build on public health guidance to establish the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 School Settings](#). These Ministry of Education guidelines must be followed by schools and school districts, including if there are any differences between them and the public health 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.

### Recommendations for Individuals

#### *Vaccines*

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. It is strongly recommended that adults interacting with children be fully vaccinated. 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. 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](#).

Schools are encouraged to share evidence-based information and promote opportunities to be vaccinated in partnership with public health. More information on COVID-19 vaccination and the workplace is available on the [Work Safe B.C. website](#). Evidence-based immunization information and tools for B.C. residents are available from [BCCDC](#) and [ImmunizeBC](#) websites.

### *Health Awareness*

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

### *What To Do When Sick*

The management of COVID-19 in the community is now more aligned with the management of other serious respiratory infections. Staff, students, or other persons in the school setting who are exhibiting [symptoms of COVID-19](#) should stay home until they are well enough to participate in regular activities. Staff, children, or other persons can attend school if their symptoms are consistent with a previously diagnosed health condition (e.g., seasonal allergies) or symptoms have improved enough to where you feel well enough to return to regular activities and their fever has resolved without the use of fever-reducing medication (e.g. acetaminophen, ibuprofen). 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. If you are unsure or concerned about your symptoms, connect with your 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 (i.e. a doctor's note) to confirm the health status of any individual, beyond those required to support medical accommodation as per usual practice.

If a staff member, student, or other person develops symptoms of illness at school and is unable to participate in regular activities, they should be supported to go home until their symptoms have improved. Appropriate infection control precautions should be taken while the person is preparing to leave the school premises, including use of appropriate hand hygiene and cleaning/disinfection of surfaces soiled with bodily fluids. They may use a mask if they are experiencing respiratory symptoms.



### *Hand hygiene*

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. To learn about how to perform hand hygiene, please refer to the BCCDC's [hand hygiene poster](#).

### *Respiratory Etiquette*

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.

### *Non-Medical Masks and Face Coverings*

The decision to wear a mask beyond when it is recommended by public health is a personal one, based on individual preference. Some students and staff may choose to continue to wear a non-medical mask or face covering throughout the day or for certain activities. The choice of staff and students to choose whether they practice additional personal prevention measures should be respected. Information on non-medical masks is available from [BCCDC](#).

### *PPE When Providing Student Services*

Those providing services to students with medical complexity, immune suppression, receiving delegated care, or with disabilities and diverse abilities that require them to be in close proximity to a student should follow routine infection control practices needed for general communicable disease prevention.

## Recommendations for School Settings

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### *Ventilation and Air Exchange*

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 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.

### *Cleaning and Disinfection*

Regular cleaning and disinfection can help prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Cleaning of frequently touched surfaces should occur in line with regular practices and when visibly dirty.

### *Gatherings & Events*



School extracurricular and social gatherings and events (including those occurring within and between schools), regardless of location, should occur in line with the guidance in this document, as well as any applicable local, regional, or provincial public health recommendations and Orders. Schools can transition to regular practices for indoor gatherings and events in line with [Ministry of Education expectations](#).

#### *Space Arrangement*

In learning environments, schools can return to classroom and learning environment configurations and activities that best meet learner needs and preferred educational approaches.

#### *Visitors*

Schools can return to their normal practices for welcoming visitors.

#### *Transportation*

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

#### *Community Use of Schools*

Schools can return to normal practices for the community use of schools.

