



Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings

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Introduction

This document was developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the BC Centre for Disease Control, Indigenous rightsholders and education partners – including teachers, parents and school leaders – to outline requirements and recommended measures for K-12 school communicable disease prevention plans. These comprehensive guidelines build on the [Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) developed by the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC).

[WorkSafeBC guidance for workplaces](#) should be used to determine what measures should be in place for non-school spaces operated by a school district or independent school authority (e.g. board/authority offices, maintenance facilities, etc.).

Guiding principles of the K-12 sector response, as well as additional guidance regarding students from First Nations communities, and students and parents/caregivers with immune compromise or medical complexity is available in the [K-12 Education Recovery Plan](#).

KEY PRINCIPLES

- All boards of education, independent school authorities and schools are required to have communicable disease prevention plans in place.
- Boards of education, independent school authorities and schools are expected to use this guidance to develop communicable disease prevention plans. Plans must also meet workplace requirements as outlined by [WorkSafeBC](#).
 - In the case of any variance between the guidelines in this document and the guidance in the BCCDC's [Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#), schools and school districts should follow the guidelines outlined in this document.
- Public health may issue temporary provincial or regional recommendations or orders, and/or the Ministry of Education may issue Addendums to this guidance of additional prevention measures during times of increased communicable disease risk. These should be incorporated into communicable disease prevention plans, where applicable.

SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Schools can be supportive environments for communicable disease prevention by:

- Having staff model personal prevention measures (e.g., hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette), and assist younger students as needed.
- Sharing reliable information, including from the BC Centre for Disease Control and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, to parents, families and caregivers.
- Promoting [personal practices](#) in the school (e.g., posters).
- Ensuring individual choices for personal practices (e.g., wearing a mask or face covering) are supported and treated with respect, recognizing varying personal comfort levels.

Schools should utilize an inclusive and trauma-informed lens in developing their communicable disease prevention plan.

Schools should utilize positive and inclusive approaches to supporting personal practices aligned with existing professional practices to address behaviour¹. Approaches should not exclude students from participating in school or potentially result in stigma.

Schools should proactively communicate the scope and timeline for changes to their communicable disease prevention plan to their school community when measures are removed or added.

VACCINES

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. **BCCDC strongly recommends adults interacting with children to be fully vaccinated.** All COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Canada protect against serious complications, including from the Omicron variant. See BCCDC for trusted information on [COVID-19 vaccines](#).

Schools and school districts are expected to work with their local health authority to share evidence-based information about vaccination (e.g. from [BCCDC](#) and [ImmunizeBC](#)), and to explore opportunities to establish school-based vaccination clinics when requested.²

¹ This includes where a student, staff, or other adult (including visitors) cannot comply with a specific personal measure due to health or behavioural reasons.

² The [Inter-Ministerial Protocols for the Provision of Support Services to Schools](#) (p.12-13) require boards of education and participating independent school authorities to provide a designated space in each school for public health nurses or other qualified health personnel to carry out their duties (including immunizations).



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Communicable Disease Prevention Plans

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREVENTION PLANS

Communicable disease prevention plans focus on reducing the risk of transmission of communicable diseases (including COVID-19). These include ongoing prevention measures and may include temporary additional measures. 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.).

School districts, independent school authorities and schools must regularly review their communicable disease prevention plans, 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. Schools and school districts are also expected to update their communicable disease prevention plans in alignment with updates to this document.

Additional information, resources and employer requirements are available from [WorkSafeBC](#).

COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING/ORIENTATION

School districts, independent school authorities and schools should communicate relevant guidance, recommendations and orders from public health to their school communities.

As required by WorkSafe BC, school districts and independent school authorities must:

- Provide newly hired staff and staff who change worksites with an orientation and any required training on the communicable disease prevention measures for the worksite.
- Inform staff and provide any associated training when there are changes to the communicable disease prevention measures.

These should occur in consultation with site joint health and safety committees and/or worker health and safety representatives.

School districts and independent school authorities should also provide orientation opportunities to students and others in the school (e.g., parents/caregivers, teacher candidates, volunteers) to ensure all school community members are aware of their responsibilities.

Orientation examples include online information, distribution of orientation and training materials that are clear, concise and easily understood, interactive sessions with Q&A's, material in multiple languages to meet community needs, etc.

EMERGENCY AND EVACUATION DRILLS

Emergency and evacuation planning and drills should consider communicable disease prevention plans. In the event of an actual emergency, communicable disease prevention measures can be suspended to ensure for a timely, efficient and safe response.

Environmental Practices

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

Regular cleaning and disinfection can help prevent the transmission of communicable diseases from contaminated objects and surfaces.

Products & Procedures

For **cleaning**, use water and detergent (e.g. liquid dishwashing soap), or common, commercially available products, along with good cleaning practices. For hard-to-reach areas, use a brush and rinse thoroughly prior to disinfecting.

For **disinfection**, use common, commercially available disinfectants listed on Health Canada's [hard-surface disinfectants for use against coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Follow these procedures when cleaning and disinfecting:

- Always wash hands before and after handling shared objects.
- Items and surfaces that a person has placed in their mouths or that have been in contact with bodily fluids should be cleaned as soon as possible and between uses by different people.
- Dishwasher-safe items can be cleaned and disinfected in a dishwasher with a hot rinse cycle.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Frequency

The following frequency guidelines must be adhered to when cleaning and disinfecting:

- General cleaning of the premises, and cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces, **at least once in a 24-hour period**. (See [Frequently Touched Surfaces](#) section below for examples of frequently touched surfaces.)
- Clean any surface that is visibly dirty.
- Empty garbage containers daily.

The requirements for daily cleaning and disinfecting outlined above do not apply to spaces/equipment that are not being used by students, staff or visitors. Many schools and districts have implemented procedures such as securing unoccupied spaces or adding sign-in sheets posted next to room entrances that help custodial staff focus cleaning/disinfecting activities on those spaces that have been utilized by staff or students.

Frequently Touched Surfaces

Frequently touched surfaces are items touched by larger numbers of students and staff. They can include doorknobs, light switches, hand railings, water fountains and toilet handles, as well as shared equipment (e.g., computer keyboards, PE/sports and music equipment), appliances (e.g., microwaves) and service counters (e.g. library circulation desk).

Frequently-touched items like toys or manipulatives that may not be able to be cleaned often (e.g. fabrics) or at all (e.g. sand, foam, playdough, etc.) can be used. Carpets and rugs (e.g. in Kindergarten and StrongStart classes) can also be used.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Bodily Fluids

Follow these procedures, in conjunction with school/district policies, when cleaning and disinfecting bodily fluids (e.g., runny nose, vomit, stool, urine):

- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids.
- Wash hands before wearing and after removing gloves.
- Follow regular health and safety procedure and regularly used PPE (e.g., gloves, protective or woven sleeves) for blood and bodily fluids (e.g. toileting, spitting, biting).

LAUNDRY

Schools can use regular laundering practices.

GENERAL VENTILATION AND AIR CIRCULATION

School districts and independent school authorities are required to ensure that heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are designed, operated, and maintained as per standards and specifications for ongoing comfort for workers ([Part 4 of the OHS Regulation](#)). 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 and:

- schools with recycled/recirculated air systems should consider upgrading their current filters to finer grain filters such as MERV 13 filter if possible; and
- schools with fresh air intake systems should consider increasing their average air exchanges as detailed on the [ASHRAE website](#).

School district and site-based plans should include provisions for when a school/worksite's ventilation system is temporarily compromised (e.g. partial power outage, ventilation break down).

In order to enhance school ventilation, schools should consider:

- 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 should 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.

See the [WorkSafeBC website](#) and [ASHRAE Reopening of Schools and Universities Guidance](#) for more information on ventilation and air exchange.

HAND HYGIENE

Rigorous hand washing with plain soap and water or using an [effective hand sanitizer](#) reduces the spread of illness. Follow these guidelines to ensure effective hand hygiene in schools:

- 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 rub 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.

Supplies

Certain additional supplies (e.g., hand sanitizer, non-medical masks, etc.) continue to be available to school districts and independent school authorities at no charge, except for shipping costs through PEAK Health. Ordering information has been provided directly to school district and independent school authority contacts.

Administrative Practices

SPACE ARRANGEMENT

Schools can use classroom and learning environment configurations and activities that best meet learner needs and preferred educational approaches.

Staff Only Spaces

Staff only spaces can use preferred configurations.

SCHOOL GATHERINGS AND EVENTS

Schools can resume all types of gatherings and events (including staff only gatherings and events), and there are no longer specific capacity limits. Schools and staff should use an inclusive and trauma-informed lens when planning school gatherings and events. See the [Visitor Access/Community Use section](#) for more information on protocols for visitors.

HEALTH AWARENESS & ILLNESS PRACTICES

Health Awareness

Health awareness reduces the likelihood of a person with a communicable disease coming to school when they are infectious. This includes a person checking regularly they (or their child) are not experiencing symptoms of illness (including but not limited to COVID-19 symptoms) to ensure they are not coming to school when they are sick (including if they are unable to participate fully in regular activities due to symptoms of illness).

School and School District Responsibilities

School administrators should ensure that everyone entering a school is aware and routinely reminded of their responsibility to practice health awareness. This can be supported through communications (e.g. emails/letters to parents and staff), orientation activities (e.g., meetings, videos) and other reminders (e.g., signage on doors).

School administrators should also establish procedures for students and staff who become sick while at school/work.

- Some students or staff may not be able to be picked up immediately. As such, schools should have a space available where the student or staff can wait comfortably and is separated from others, and should have non-medical masks available for those experiencing respiratory symptoms who choose to wear one.
 - Schools must provide supervision for younger children. Supervising staff can choose to wear a mask and/or face shield, and should wear gloves and practice diligent hand hygiene if touching bodily fluids.

- Staff responsible for facility cleaning should clean and disinfect the surfaces/equipment which the person's bodily fluids may have been in contact with while they were ill (e.g., their desk in a classroom, the bathroom stall they used, etc.) prior to the surfaces/equipment being used by others. Cleaning/disinfecting the entire room the person was in (a "terminal" clean) is not required in these circumstances.

Schools and districts 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 practices.

What To Do When Sick

Students, staff and other adults should follow public health guidance and/or the recommendation of their health care provider when they are sick. Information specific to COVID-19 is available from [BCCDC](#).

PROTOCOLS FOR MANAGING COMMUNICABLE DISEASE ACTIVITY AT SCHOOL

Public health (including Medical Health Officers) play the lead role in managing communicable disease activity (including COVID-19) at schools. More information is available in the [COVID-19 Protocols for School & District Administrators and Staff](#).

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES/DIVERSE ABILITIES AND/OR RECEIVING HEALTH SERVICES

Expectations

School districts and independent schools are expected to implement health and safety measures that promote inclusion of students with disabilities/diverse abilities.

In-class instruction may not be suitable for some children (or families) with severe immune compromise or medical complexity, which should be determined on a case-by-case basis with a medical care provider. Districts should follow regular practices for those needing alternative learning arrangements due to immune compromise or medical complexity to ensure access to learning and supports.

Guidelines for Staff and/or Those Working with Students with Disabilities/Diverse Abilities, Complex Behaviours, Medical Complexities, or Receiving Delegated Care Where Physical Contact May Be Required

Those providing health or education services that require being in close proximity to a student should follow the student's individual care plan (if one is in place) and their standard risk assessment methods to determine what PPE is needed for general communicable disease prevention in accordance with routine practices (e.g., gloves for toileting). Additional personal protective equipment is not required beyond that used in their regular course of work.

Those providing health services in schools may be receiving different guidance related to PPE from their regulatory college or employer. Health service providers are encouraged to work with their employer to confirm what PPE is recommended for the services they provide in school settings.

Parents and caregivers of children who are considered at higher risk of severe illness due to COVID-19 are encouraged to consult with their health care provider to determine their child's level of risk. Students are not required to wear a mask or face covering when receiving services, though may continue to based on their or their parent/caregiver's personal choice.

Schools should continue to have non-medical masks on hand for those who have forgotten theirs but would like to wear one. For more information, see the [Personal Protective Equipment](#) section.

BUSES

The following strategies are recommended for student transportation on buses:

- Buses used for transporting students should be cleaned and disinfected according to the guidance provided in the [Cleaning and Disinfecting section](#) of this document.
- Bus drivers and students should be encouraged to practice [hand hygiene](#) and [respiratory etiquette](#).
- Bus drivers, teachers and students in Kindergarten to Grade 12 may choose to wear masks or face coverings when they are on the bus.

VISITOR ACCESS/COMMUNITY USE

Schools should ensure visitors are aware of and follow a school's communicable disease prevention plan, including personal practices. This could include posting information by the entrance to the school, on the school's website and including in communications to students and families.

After hours community use of facilities should occur in alignment with activities permitted as per relevant local, regional, provincial and federal public health recommendations and Orders.

CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

All curriculum, programs and activities should operate in alignment with school communicable disease prevention plans, including school-led activities held off campus³ (e.g. sports academies, community-based programs/courses). Schools should continue to implement ongoing communicable disease prevention practices (e.g. cleaning and disinfecting, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette) specific to the activity. Additional considerations are noted below.

³ Students and staff may also required to follow the prevention measures required by the off-campus facility. Where there is a conflict, the stricter measures should be followed.

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 that 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 a conflict with a school's communicable disease prevention plan, the more stringent safety protocols should be followed.

Kindergarten Program and Entry

- Include information about communicable disease prevention measures that will be in place as part of communications to students and their families prior to school start.
- Parents/caregivers must follow guidelines for [visitors](#).
- Provide opportunities for Kindergarten students to learn and practice respecting personal space, recognizing they are unlikely to be able to do this at all times.
- Gently remind students of the expectations throughout the day and encourage students to kindly support one another.
- Frequently-touched items like toys or manipulatives that may not be able to be cleaned often (e.g. fabrics) or at all (e.g. sand, foam, playdough, etc.) and carpets and rugs (e.g., for circle time activities) can be used.

Music / Physical and Health Education (PHE) / Outdoor / Food and Culinary / Theatre, Film and Dance / Other Shared Equipment Programs

- Shared equipment should be cleaned and disinfected as per the [Cleaning and Disinfecting guidelines](#) and students should be encouraged to practice proper hand hygiene before and after shared equipment use.
 - Equipment that touches the mouth (e.g. instrument mouth pieces, water bottles, utensils) should not be shared unless cleaned and disinfected in between uses.

School Libraries / Learning Commons

- Laminated or glossy paper-based products (e.g. books, magazines, worksheets, etc.) and items with plastic covers (e.g. DVDs) are low risk items. Regular book browsing and circulation processes can occur as per routine practice. There is no need to clean, disinfect or hold back these items for any period of time.
- For information on cleaning, including technological devices, see the guidelines in the [Cleaning and Disinfecting](#) section.
- The BC Teacher Librarians Association has developed [Recommendations for Access to Library Learning Commons Resources to Meet COVID-19 Requirements](#). In the case of any discrepancy in guidance, schools and school districts are expected to follow the Ministry of Education guidelines outlined in this document.

Trades in Training / Work Experience Programs

Students enrolled in individual training/work experience programs should follow the communicable disease prevention plan required by the workplace/facility.

Classes (or other similar groupings of students) participating in training/work experience programs together should follow the more stringent measures (if applicable) between the school and the workplace/facility's communicable disease prevention plans.

Personal Practices

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. Refer to [Supportive School Environments](#) 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 and immediately 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., waterbottles, instrument mouth pieces).