

**COVID-19**

**Return-to-Campus**

**Primer**



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*Primer produced by*  
**B.C. Post-Secondary Institutions**  
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# COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Primer

The *COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.'s Post-Secondary Sector (Guidelines)* are being updated by a team of experts from the public post-secondary sector, and representatives from the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, Regional Health Authorities and the BC Centre for Disease Control. Updated guidelines will reflect predicted COVID-19 conditions for the fall along with updated infection prevention and control measures appropriate for those conditions. Flexibility and adaptability based on scientific evidence and epidemiology to manage the COVID-19 virus will continue to be important as the post-secondary system returns to on-campus activities.

The *Guidelines* are expected to be released in the coming weeks with implementation planned for August 1<sup>st</sup>. In the interim, the *COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Primer* is a planning tool intended to provide high-level guidance to support planning for the safe return of students, faculty and staff throughout the summer, and the updating of campus safety plans in anticipation of a full return to face-to-face instruction. Until the revised *Guidelines* are implemented on August 1<sup>st</sup>, the current *Guidelines* remain in effect.

## Planning Context

On March 8, 2021, B.C.'s Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, advised public post-secondary institutions to begin planning for a full return to on-campus teaching, learning and research in September 2021 (see Attachment 1). It is very important for everyone's health and well-being to get back on campus. Dr. Henry expressed deep confidence that the combination of mass immunization contributing to community immunity, the application of revised health and safety protocols in the *COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.'s Post-Secondary Sector*, and the regular review and updating of multi-layered institutional safety plans will support the safe resumption of on-campus activities.

Planning for a full return to campus at a time when COVID-19 infections are high requires institutions to look with extra care at what campus conditions are likely to be in September 2021. Planning assumptions and guidance for returning to campus will be informed by a continued commitment to protecting the health, safety and well-being of the campus community, while remaining mindful of the importance of adaptability as conditions change.

# Fall Planning Assumptions

By September 2021, it is anticipated that:

- ▶ COVID-19 transmission will be low, and more importantly serious infections will be uncommon. COVID-19 is a virus that is unlikely to be eliminated from the population. However, COVID-19 can be managed in the same manner as other common respiratory infections.
- ▶ All adults in B.C. will have had an opportunity to receive at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine before July 1, 2021, while many will have received two doses by the end of August.

## Infection Prevention and Control Measures

Based on guidance from the Provincial Health Officer and experience to date within B.C. and other jurisdictions, controlled environments such as post-secondary educational settings are lower-risk sites for COVID-19 transmission. The multiple layers of infection prevention measures in place have helped post-secondary campuses remain open and available for learners with remote adaptive learning while successfully minimizing the spread of COVID-19.

While elimination of the COVID-19 virus is not feasible in the near future, we can certainly adapt to living with COVID-19 as we do with other manageable seasonal ailments such as influenza. Immunization and prevention and exposure control measures are the tools we have to make everyone less vulnerable to getting COVID-19 or experiencing serious outcomes.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 relies on everyone doing their part, including immunization, self-administered health checks, staying home when sick, wearing masks when appropriate, practicing hand hygiene, and maintaining strong public health measures such as monitoring, testing and contact tracing protocols.

Authorized vaccines have proven to be highly effective at reducing serious outcomes from the COVID-19 virus. B.C. is expecting all adults in the province to have the option of receiving their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine

before July 1, 2021. As immunization programs roll out, their positive effects will build at the population level, reducing transmission in communities, decreasing serious outcomes of COVID-19, and thereby even protecting unvaccinated individuals.

As conditions improve through the summer, it is reasonable to expect that some of the more restrictive public health measures affecting our personal and professional lives will be relaxed and replaced with other proven infection prevention and control measures. While no single layer of protection against COVID-19 is perfect, when multiple layers of protection are combined, the risk of transmission is significantly reduced. Due to the anticipated effect of the immunization program, the layering of core public health measures, and the tailoring of prevention and control measures, physical distancing will not be required in controlled post-secondary classrooms and instructional settings.

Core measures that are expected to remain in place for September, until otherwise determined by the Provincial Health Officer, include:

- ▶ Completing a daily COVID-19 self-assessment and not attending campus when ill;
- ▶ Following handwashing and hygiene protocols;
- ▶ Maintaining up-to-date campus COVID-19 Safety Plans;
- ▶ Continuing daily cleaning protocols in all indoor settings and on high touch surfaces; and
- ▶ Requiring non-medical masks in indoor common areas depending on the rate of COVID-19 transmission.

Some federal travel restrictions may remain in place in the fall. It is anticipated that students entering Canada to study will continue to be permitted entry if they are attending a designated learning institution with a COVID-19 readiness plan approved by the province. These students will be required to continue following federal testing and quarantine requirements in place at the time of entry into Canada.

# Safety is Everyone's Responsibility

We can all contribute personally and professionally by getting vaccinated (as we are able), following campus safety plans, performing our daily health check, staying home when sick, wearing masks as required, following handwashing and hygiene etiquette, and following public health orders and guidelines both on and off campus.

It is up to each one of us to do our part, but it is our collective efforts that will make the difference.

## General Campus Planning

In addition to a comprehensive immunization program, a number of core public health measures and tailored infection prevention and control measures are expected to continue to support the safe resumption of on-campus activities. These anticipated measures are outlined below.

### Campus Logistics

- ▶ Daily self-assessment for COVID-19 symptoms will continue. Individuals experiencing symptoms should stay home, consult the BC COVID-19 self-assessment tool to determine if COVID-19 testing is needed, and contact 811 or their healthcare provider for medical advice as necessary.
- ▶ Where possible and practical, managing the safe flow of pedestrian traffic within buildings and confined areas will be recommended, at least in the short term. Directional arrows in hallways for traffic flow and denoting building entrances and exits are recommended. Furniture for informal or non-educational/non-study use should be organized to discourage crowding. Directions should be posted to minimize time spent in confined spaces (e.g. elevators, washrooms).

- ▶ Anticipate a role for non-medical masks. Institutions should anticipate that masks may be required in indoor common areas including lobbies, hallways, washrooms, elevators, kitchens, break rooms, and other high-traffic common areas where individuals circulate freely. Any requirements for masks in more structured indoor settings like classrooms, libraries, and work spaces will be informed by the Provincial Health Officer and the *COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.'s Post-Secondary Sector*.
- ▶ WorkSafeBC continues to advise that building ventilation systems, in good operating condition, do not contribute to the spread of COVID-19. Institutions should ensure that building ventilation (HVAC) systems are operating and maintained in accordance with WorkSafeBC requirements and relevant ASHRAE<sup>1</sup> Standards for indoor air quality.
- ▶ Barriers or partitions may continue to be used in busy client-facing settings including retail checkouts, kiosks, and food service counters. They may also be considered in smaller, open office spaces where multiple workstations are in close proximity.

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1 ASHRAE – the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers

## Student Housing and Dining Facilities

- On-campus student housing providers can plan for full or close-to-full occupancy for the fall. Institutions may wish to hold back 1-2% of total student housing beds for the isolation or quarantine of students in the event of infection.
- It is anticipated that dining facilities for student housing and cafeterias serving students, faculty and staff at educational institutions will continue to be exempt from any provincial closure orders for restaurants and bars. On-campus restaurants and pubs should follow the provincial requirements for food and liquor serving premises including closures and restrictions when applicable.

## Cleaning and Hygiene

- Hand hygiene should be actively promoted. Hand sanitization stations are recommended for placement outside classrooms, at regular intervals throughout common spaces and at the entrances/exits to all public spaces.
- Educational spaces, public spaces and high touch areas should be cleaned daily and routinely. Cleaning between classes is not required.

## COVID-19 Safety Plans

- Before resuming activities on-campus, WorkSafeBC requires each post-secondary institution to have a COVID-19 Safety Plan in place. The Safety Plan outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These plans should be aligned with the safety guidance and layers of protection outlined in the current version of the *COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.'s Post-Secondary Sector*, and follow any additional health and safety protocols prescribed by WorkSafeBC.

## Faculty and Staff Considerations

- We acknowledge that some faculty and staff may feel anxious or hesitant about a return to campus. Employees should be clearly informed of new or updated workplace safety procedures, and how they are designed to protect faculty and staff from COVID-19 before returning to the workplace.
- Formal requests for a medical accommodation should be considered based on the individual circumstances and in accordance with collective agreements, legal obligations and established accommodation review timelines.
- Faculty and staff are eligible to take up to three (3) hours of paid leave to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Amendments to the Employment Standards Act provide this support for both doses of the vaccine.
- Faculty and staff absences may be higher than during pre-pandemic periods due to ongoing self-assessment and self-isolation requirements. While community transmission is expected to be very low, employees may need to take time off or work from home if diagnosed with COVID-19, or advised to self-isolate or quarantine as part of the contact tracing process.

## Related Public Health Guidelines

- For guidelines that relate to other aspects of campus operations beyond the delivery of post-secondary education and training, the post-secondary sector will continue to rely on Provincial Health Officer orders and guidelines developed and updated for other sectors (e.g., size of outdoor gatherings, use of athletic and recreational facilities, travel, retail services, etc.).
- Institutions should continue to work with their local medical health officers for campus-specific questions, local / regional public health guidance, and COVID-19 case and contact management.

- COVID-19 vaccines are available to all adults living, working or studying in BC during the pandemic. You do not need a Personal Health Number, BC Services Card or to be enrolled in B.C.'s Medical Services Plan to get the vaccine. All adult students will be eligible to receive the vaccine, including International students. The COVID-19 vaccine will not be mandatory. There are no vaccines in Canada that are mandatory. However, [\*ImmunizeBC\*](#) highly recommends getting the vaccine.
- Rapid point-of-care screening for COVID-19 is being used by BC Health Authorities for COVID-19 testing in settings with increased risk of transmission and/or outbreaks. Point-of-care testing for COVID-19 is available to post-secondary institutions that meet the indications outlined in B.C.'s [\*Rapid Point of Care Testing Strategy\*](#). Institutions interested in rapid COVID-19 point-of-care tests can email [\*RapidPOCTeam@phsa.ca\*](mailto:RapidPOCTeam@phsa.ca) for an intake assessment.

## Educational Activities:

- Educational activities are defined as those activities offered with the intention of delivering and/or supporting student learning and development. Educational activities include both structured activities scheduled in classrooms, lecture theatres, libraries, studios, workshops, labs, field schools, practicum, performance, or research settings as well as informal activities engaged in by faculty, staff and students that support teaching, learning, research, and student development.
- Institutions have the discretion to identify which activities are considered educational activities based on the above definition.
- Educational activities associated with orientation events are encouraged. Non-educational or social activities throughout the year should be planned according to the prevailing Provincial Health Officer orders in effect at that time.

## Classroom Logistics

The Provincial Health Officer has indicated that there are no limits on the number of participants for in-class educational activities. Fall classes can be scheduled without physical distancing requirements (e.g. a classroom with 30 seats can be scheduled with 30 students; a lecture theatre with 150 seats can be scheduled with 150 students).

It is recommended that students select a specific seat / space within a class or lab at the start of term, and endeavour to use that same seat or sit in the same immediate area until the end of term. There will be no requirement for institutions to cohort students, specifically assign seats, or take attendance for educational activities.

## Student Supports / Accommodation

- Indigenous learners and First Nations communities might continue to take increased safety measures during the pandemic, which may mean that some students will not be able to attend in-person classes. Some First Nations may still be under states of emergency. Institutions should work with First Nations communities and Indigenous learners to develop plans to support continued access to some academic programming and services for these students.
- Institutions are strongly encouraged to develop and/or follow established accommodation mechanisms to ensure that students who cannot physically be on campus (e.g., they are ill, adhering to quarantine rules, self-isolating, attending a vaccine appointment, etc.) are not significantly disadvantaged in their educational pursuits. Institutions are also strongly encouraged to waive any requirements for medical documentation from students for absences given the strain this will cause on the medical community.
- Institutions are encouraged to work collaboratively with student societies, clubs and governments to assist in the development and implementation of COVID-19 safety plans, and positively reinforce COVID-safe behaviours both on and off campus.

## Mental Health Supports

- Mental health supports will be critical to support a full return to in-person activities on-campus. Communication plans should be in place to raise awareness of these supports.

## Program-Specific Considerations

- Students and instructors will be expected to follow guidelines for specific settings where work integrated learning placements occur, including clinical, teaching, internships, co-op placements, and other community engaged work placements. Institutions should be knowledgeable of program-specific COVID-19 safety protocols and ensure that student and instructor risk is minimized in these placements.
- Institutions, students, faculty and staff should adhere to travel advisories when considering studying or working abroad.

## Student Health Services

- Student health services can play a key role by liaising with local public health officials to ensure students, including out-of-province and international students, have the most current information about the availability of vaccines. Institutions should continue to work with their local Medical Health Officer within their Regional Health Authority.
- Institutional student health services should identify and communicate steps that students should take if they develop symptoms, including where to access testing.
- Public health authorities are responsible for determining notification processes and requirements for confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- Institutions may be asked to assist public health authorities in notifying close contacts, assisting in the identification of people who may have been exposed, distribution of materials prepared by the public health authorities, or supporting public notification efforts.
- For more information, please refer to the [COVID-19 Contact Tracing and Notification Protocols](#) on page 7 in the current *Guidelines*.

# Attachment 1



1190387

March 8, 2021

Dear Post-Secondary Institution Presidents:

I am writing to you to acknowledge the important leadership the post-secondary sector has shown in BC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the past 12 months, and to support you with the critical goal of resuming safe on-campus teaching, learning and research in September 2021.

Your institutions worked in partnership with the BC Centre for Disease Control, WorkSafeBC, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training, and staff in my office to produce and update the "COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.'s Post-Secondary Sector." Those Guidelines and your institutional health and safety plans helped the sector to be very successful in mitigating the spread of COVID-19. The quick adaptation to remote learning, while staying open and available for learners, played a major role in the success of B.C.'s pandemic response.

My office and our medical health officers share your concerns about the wellbeing of young adults who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, including worsening mental health, increased financial instability and diminished future prospects. We also acknowledge this has been a difficult and stressful time for faculty and staff. It is imperative to get back on campus for everyone's health and well-being.

There are very good reasons to be confident that a return to on-campus instruction in the fall can be undertaken safely and successfully. Current projections of the COVID-19 vaccine supply in BC suggest that all vulnerable and high-risk groups should be immunized this spring, and the majority of the adult population by the summer. Young adults aged 18-24 should receive the vaccine no later than the end of July, but more likely sooner. The timing of immunization should not be a determinant of planning for a return to on-campus activities.

Given the expected timelines for immunization it is essential that we plan for a full return to in-person activities on campus in September 2021, including in-person instruction, with faculty and staff returning to campus sooner. Immunization will support what seems likely to become stable coexistence with COVID-19 as another manageable, seasonal ailment.

.../2

New variants of the SARS CoV-2 virus will likely continue to emerge. We will respond to them through monitoring, re-formulation of tests and vaccines, and through other measures as needed depending on the characteristics of the variants. Targeted testing and contact tracing by health authorities will remain key supplements to immunization in rapidly controlling transmission. These activities will be part of normal, ongoing life with COVID-19.

We have also learned over the past year that when we implement effective safety plans, large sectors can operate safely. Reducing the opportunity for infectious contacts will continue to be an important strategy. As such, safety plans will remain important, with updates as required. My team looks forward to working with you to fine-tune plans for the prevention activities we have all become so familiar with: self-administered health checks; facilitating hand cleaning through access to soap and water or encouraging people to use hand sanitizers; use of masks; early detection and rapid testing of potential cases; isolation; and case and contact management.

The experience of the past year can help with a safe return to post-secondary campuses. Above and beyond immunization, infectious contacts in group settings at post-secondary institutions can be reduced through a variety of prevention and exposure control measures. Two-meter physical distancing has been my guidance for uncontrolled group settings. Such distancing is neither practical, nor necessary, in the controlled context of post-secondary instructional settings. I am very confident that the combination of immunization and continued application of the “COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.’s Post-Secondary Sector” will support the safe and complete resumption of campus teaching, learning, and research.

We also believe student housing, dining and other on-campus student services will be able to return to normal or close-to-normal capacities by following revised protocols in the “COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.’s Post-Secondary Sector.”

Based on what we have learned in the past year, and the important protection that immunization will provide, I, as well as the medical health officers in British Columbia, strongly support the resumption of on-campus activities in September 2021. Public health will also continue to work with post-secondary institutions to determine if measures are needed to keep activities inside and outside the classroom safe in the fall, such as public transportation, socializing outside of class, athletics, and arrival and quarantine of international students.

Thank you, again, for the important role you play in supporting the provincial COVID-19 response, and in helping British Columbians to realize the full experience and benefits of post-secondary education. I look forward to working with you to strengthen the collaboration between public health and post-secondary institutions for a full and safe return to on-campus instruction in September 2021. We all look forward to the rich campus interactions that will make learning and personal development so much more effective and supportive for students, faculty, and staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bonnie Henry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bonnie" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Henry".

Bonnie Henry  
MD, MPH, FRCPC  
Provincial Health Officer

Cc Honourable Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training  
Shannon Baskerville, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training  
Max Blouw, President Research Universities' Council of BC  
Ruth Wittenberg President, BC Association of Institutes and Universities  
Colin Ewart, President BC Colleges  
Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health  
Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health  
Chief Medical Health Officers, Regional Health Authorities  
Chief Medical Officer, First Nations Health Authority  
Deputy Provincial Health Officers



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