



K-12 school guidelines for 2021-22: COVID-19

The Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Department of Education are providing guidance to help teachers, administrative staff, students and families prepare for the upcoming 2021-22 school year. These will be revisited regularly to ensure they remain in line with the current COVID-19 situation. Adjustments may be made based on vaccination rates and COVID-19 epidemiology locally and nationally.

It's expected that schools can return to near normal operations. Some measures will continue to be in place to keep schools low-risk settings for COVID-19.

Vaccination

Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in our K-12 schools and communities. Eligible students and staff are strongly encouraged to get their second dose of the vaccine at least 2 weeks prior to the start of the school year.

Staying home when sick

- Parents and guardians should assess their children for [symptoms](#) before sending them to school.
- Staff should assess themselves for symptoms every day.
- All students and staff should stay home and [arrange for testing](#) if they have symptoms, no matter how mild.
- To help assess symptoms, parents and staff can use the [COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) or contact a health care provider for additional guidance.
- Signs can be posted throughout schools to remind staff, students and visitors to stay home if they're sick even if their symptoms are mild.

Ventilation

- All mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems must be working properly.
- Open windows and doors to improve natural ventilation if the weather permits.
- Consider using HEPA filters in situations where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is higher due to poor ventilation.

Cleaning and disinfection

- As the risk of COVID-19 transmission from surfaces is low, it is anticipated that schools will transition to regular cleaning practices.
- Singing and the playing of wind instruments have a higher risk of COVID-19 transmission. Teachers and students must:
 - maintain physical distancing;
 - continue with enhanced cleaning of wind instruments; and
 - follow the [Singing and music guidelines](#).

Physical distancing

- Physical distancing is no longer mandatory for students in schools, however it's important that staff and students spread out within the available space and prevent crowding in common areas such as hallways.
- Staff must continue to maintain a 2-metre distance from students and other staff.
- Pay particular attention at the start and end of day, to entry and exit areas, and other places where people tend to gather.
- Respect traffic flow and be mindful of others' personal space.

Hand and respiratory hygiene

- Students and teachers should wash their hands regularly. Thorough hand washing with plain soap and water for at least 20 seconds is most effective at reducing the spread of illness.
- If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60 per cent alcohol.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be made available at:
 - school entrances and exits;
 - entry points to classrooms; and
 - other high traffic areas.
- Students and staff should cough and sneeze into their elbow, sleeve or a tissue.
 - Used tissues should be thrown away and hand hygiene performed immediately.
 - Lined, no-touch wastebaskets (foot pedal-operated, hand sensor, open basket) should be used, where possible.
- Refrain from touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Refrain from sharing any:
 - food;
 - drinks;
 - unwashed utensils;
 - cigarettes; or

- vaping devices.
- Signage should be posted throughout schools to remind staff, students and visitors to perform proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

Masking

- All students 5 years and older (K-12) and staff must wear masks in all indoor school settings outside of the classroom.
 - This includes hallways and on school buses.
 - Exceptions are made when eating, drinking or participating in physical activities.
- Students do not need to wear a mask in a classroom setting, but may choose to wear one if they wish.
- Staff must wear a mask if they are unable to maintain a 2-metre distance from students or other staff.

What to do if a student gets sick?

If a student develops symptoms of COVID-19, staff must take the following steps:

1. Immediately separate the symptomatic student from others in a designated, supervised area.
2. When over the age of 5 the student must wear a mask if tolerated.
3. If the student is not wearing a mask, provide them with tissues to cover their coughs or sneezes. Throw away used masks and tissues as soon as possible and perform hand hygiene.
4. Contact the student's parent or guardian to pick them up as soon as possible.
5. Anyone in the room with the ill student must wear a mask and, where possible, maintain a distance of 2 metres from them.
6. Avoid touching the student's body fluids such as mucous or saliva. If you do, thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub.
7. Once the student is picked up, wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizer.
8. Staff responsible for facility cleaning must clean and disinfect the space and areas the student occupied or used. This includes classrooms, bathrooms and common areas.

What to do if a staff member gets sick?

If a staff member develops symptoms of COVID-19, staff should go home as soon as possible.

If they cannot go home, the staff member should:

- separate themselves into an area away from others;
- wear a mask;
- maintain a distance of 2 metres from others.

Staff responsible for facility cleaning must clean and disinfect the space and areas the student occupied or used. This includes classrooms, bathrooms and common areas.

School administration is responsible for supplying the masks and cleaning materials necessary for safely responding to symptomatic students and staff members.

Riding the school bus

Mask use continues to be required for:

- bus drivers; and
- children 5 years and older.