



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

Effective the First Day of a School's Spring Break

Updated March 10, 2022



This March 2022 update incorporates updated [Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) from the BC Centre for Disease Control and aligns with the shift in the provincial COVID-19 response to a sustainable, long-term COVID-19 management strategy focused on immunization, self-management, and specific actions to protect those most at risk of severe infection. **This update is effective the first day of a school's spring break.**

Everyone in schools continues to be encouraged to do a daily health check, stay home when sick, and to practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

## Summary of Key Updates – Effective the First Day of Spring Break

Space Arrangement	Schools can return to classroom and learning environment configurations and activities that best meet learner needs and preferred educational approaches, though should still consider strategies to create space between people.
School Gatherings and Events	<p>For events with visitors (e.g., parent/caregiver spectators):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Should not exceed 50% capacity and proof of vaccination should not be implemented while the PHO Gatherings and Events Order is in place.</li><li>• Can return to 100% capacity when the PHO Gatherings and Events Order is lifted (expected end of day April 7, 2022).</li></ul> <p>Schools should make every effort to avoid venue/locations that place additional requirements that could prevent a person from being able to participate.</p>
Visitor Access/Community Use	Schools can return to routine sign in/sign out practices. Schools do not need to keep a list of the date, names and contact information of visitors for communicable disease prevention purposes.
Personal Protective Equipment	The decision to wear a mask or face covering is a personal choice. A person's choice is to be supported and respected.
Field Trips	Schools should make every effort to avoid venue/locations that place additional requirements that could prevent a person from being able to participate. If the trip cannot occur otherwise, schools can require participants to confirm they are able to meet additional requirements (e.g., are able to provide proof of vaccination).

Please refer within the document for full details.

Schools should continue to create a supportive school environment, including utilizing a trauma-informed lens when planning school activities.



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# Introduction

School supports students in developing their potential and acquiring the knowledge, skills and abilities they need for lifelong success. In-person learning, as a part of a student's education, provides the opportunity for peer engagement, which supports social and emotional development as well as overall wellness. It also provides many students access to programs and services that are integral to their overall health and well-being.

Based on guidance from the Provincial Health Officer and BC Centre for Disease Control, K-12 students can participate in full-time, in-class instruction in accordance with current public health guidelines for schools.

To date, the Ministry of Education has allocated over \$331 million in provincial and federal funding for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years to support the implementation of enhanced health and safety measures and pandemic recovery efforts in public and independent schools. Schools and school districts have utilized these funds, as well as local reserves, to increase the number of hand-hygiene stations in schools, purchase cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment, improve ventilation, hire custodial staff and support remote learning, among other measures.

## OBJECTIVES

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 the principles and requirements for maintaining safe learning environments. These comprehensive guidelines build on the [Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) developed by the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) to ensure schools have effective measures in place to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

These guidelines ([effective the first day of a school's spring break](#)) are intended to support K-12 education employees, students, parents, caregivers, administrators and school community members to:

- Be informed about communicable disease measures and how they support a safe school environment;
- Understand their roles and responsibilities in maintaining and promoting safe and healthy schools.

## KEY PRINCIPLES

- All schools are to adhere to the standards, guidelines and protocols from the BC Centre for Disease Control and [WorkSafeBC](#).
- The communicable disease guidelines outlined in this document have been developed to complement guidance from the BC Centre for Disease Control ([Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)) and WorkSafeBC.
- All boards of education and independent school authorities are required to have communicable disease plans in place that adhere to the guidelines outlined in this document.

- **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.**
- Schools and school districts are expected to update their communicable disease plans in alignment with updates to the guidelines outlined in this document, and to **document and** post their updated plans on their school/school district website **and at the school**.
- Schools should implement psychological safety measures and trauma-informed practice alongside physical health and safety measures. See the [K-12 Education Recovery Plan](#) for more information.
- Effective and ongoing communication with school leaders, community partners, Indigenous rightsholders, parents, caregivers, students, unions and employees is an essential aspect of successfully implementing these guidelines.

## COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PLANS

Communicable disease prevention focuses on reducing the risk of workplace transmission of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases, and includes both ongoing measures (e.g. hand hygiene, cleaning) and additional measures to be implemented as advised by public health.

WorkSafeBC’s [Communicable disease prevention: A guide for employers](#) outlines a four-step process to reduce the risk of communicable disease transmission in the workplace. Steps include understanding the level of risk, implementing appropriate measures, communicating policies and protocols, and updating measures and safeguards as required.

School and district administrators must regularly review their communicable disease plans, and should do so with their Site Committees and Joint Health and Safety Committees and address areas where there are identified gaps in implementation.

More information and resources on communicable disease prevention are available on the [WorkSafeBC website](#).

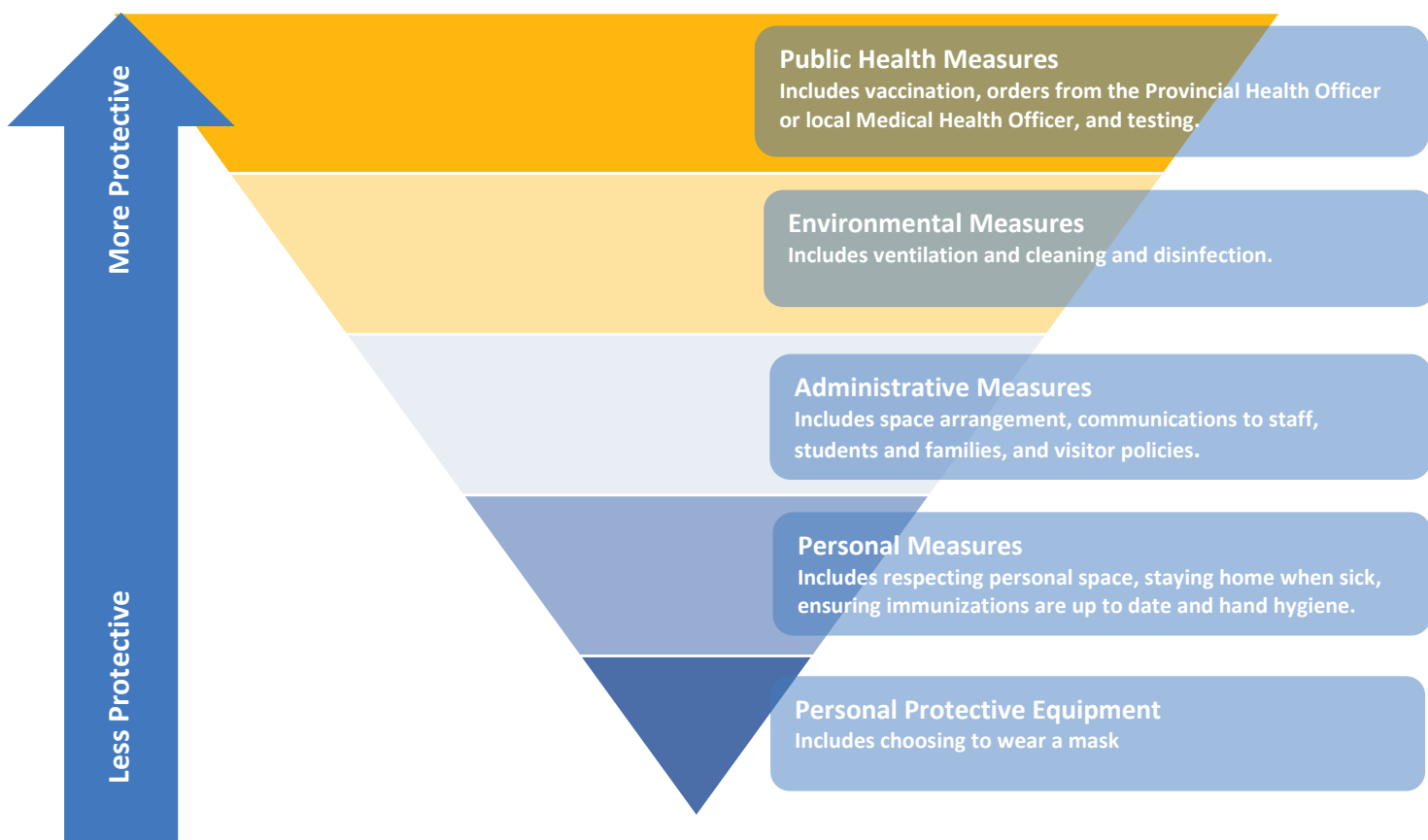
# Infection Prevention & Exposure Control Measures

Infection prevention and exposure control measures (also called communicable disease measures or health and safety measures) help create safe environments by reducing the spread of communicable diseases like COVID-19. These are more effective in settings such as schools where there is a relatively consistent grouping of people and multiple measures of various effectiveness can be routinely implemented, including:

- Robust illness policies for students and staff.
- Reinforcement and adoption of effective personal practices (e.g. hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette).
- Various environmental measures (e.g., enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices, ensuring HVAC systems are operating properly, etc.)

The Hierarchy for Infection Prevention and Exposure Control Measures for Communicable Disease describes measures that should be taken to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in schools. Control measures at the top are more effective and protective than those at the bottom. By implementing a combination of measures at each level, the risk of COVID-19 is substantially reduced.

## The Hierarchy for Infection Prevention and Exposure Control Measures for Communicable Disease



## SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Schools can support students to practice personal preventive measures by:

- Having staff model these behaviours.
- 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 safety measures in the school through the use of visual aids like floor markings and signage.

Staff should utilize positive and inclusive approaches to engage students in **personal prevention practices aligned with existing professional practices to address behaviour**<sup>1</sup>. **Approaches should not exclude students from participating in school or potentially result in stigma.**

Staff should also utilize a trauma-informed lens when planning school activities (e.g. gatherings and events) and interacting with other staff and students, including considerations around respecting others personal space<sup>2</sup>.

Students and staff may choose to wear **masks**, face shields or other personal protective equipment in schools, and those choices must be respected.

School administrators are encouraged to review the information in this section with their school community, to increase awareness and support from staff, students and families.

## 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**<sup>3</sup>. 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.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This includes where a student, staff, or other adult (including visitors) cannot comply with a specific safety measure due to health or behavioural reasons. In these circumstances, schools/districts should work with these individuals (and their parents/caregivers, if applicable to a student) to explore other environmental and administrative measures to ensure their safety and the safety of others.

<sup>2</sup> The distance from which a person feels comfortable being next to another person.

<sup>3</sup> As employers, boards of education and independent school authorities have the ability to set terms and conditions of employment and to create policies and procedures on a range of measures related to employee and workplace well-being and health and safety. Within the current COVID-19 context, some boards of education and independent school authorities may be contemplating or have implemented a vaccine policy as part of their overall health and safety strategy.

<sup>4</sup> 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).



# Space Arrangement

Schools can return to classroom and learning environment configurations and activities that best meet learner needs and preferred educational approaches, though should still consider implementing strategies to help create space between people and to support students and staff using a trauma-informed approach:

- Remind students and staff about respecting others personal space. Use visual supports, signage, prompts, video modelling, etc. as necessary.
- Use available space to spread people out, both in learning environments and for gatherings and events, where possible.
- Implement strategies that prevent crowding at pick-up and drop-off times
- Take students outside more often, where and when possible.
- Manage flow of people in common areas, including hallways and around lockers, to minimize crowding and allow for ease of people passing through.
  - Use floor markings and posters to address traffic flow throughout the school. This may include one-way hallways and designated entrance and exit doors. It is important not to reduce the number of exits and ensure the fire code is adhered to.

## STAFF ONLY SPACES

Experience to date underscores the importance of COVID-19 prevention among adults, as well as students, in the school setting. The guidelines in this document should be used to determine what measures should be in place within staff-only spaces within a school (e.g. break rooms, school office). [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.).

In addition, K-12 schools and other worksites should implement the following strategies:

- Utilize floor markings and signage to direct traffic flow and prevent crowding (e.g. in the break room, by the photocopier, etc.).
- For gatherings (e.g. meetings, pro-d, etc.), respect room occupancy limits, use available space to spread people out, and consider virtual options. Gatherings must also occur in line with those permitted as per relevant local, regional, provincial and federal public health recommendations and Orders and any related WorkSafe BC guidance.

## SCHOOL GATHERINGS AND EVENTS

For school gatherings and events that bring together multiple classes or other groupings of students (e.g., school assemblies, multiple classes doing a single activity, etc.) from the same school (but members of the school community beyond staff, students and necessary volunteers are not attending), there is not a specific capacity limit.

On March 10<sup>th</sup> 2022, the Provincial Health Officer announced the Gathering and Events Order requiring proof of vaccination for certain community-led gatherings and events would be lifted end of day on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

While that Order is in place, indoor school extracurricular and social gatherings and events that bring together members of the school community beyond staff, students and necessary volunteers (e.g., an arts club performance, community fair, etc.), or that occur between schools (e.g., a music festival, a sports game or tournament, etc.) should not exceed 50 people or 50% operating capacity (whichever is greater) and proof of vaccination requirements should not be implemented.

When the Gatherings and Events Order requiring proof of vaccination for community-led gatherings and events is lifted, all school gatherings and events can return to 100% capacity.

<b>School-led Gatherings and Events with Visitors</b>	
While PHO Gatherings & Events Order is in place	After PHO Gatherings & Events Order is lifted (expected end of day April 7, 2022)
Schools should not implement proof of vaccination requirements and indoor capacity should not exceed 50 people or 50% operating capacity (whichever is greater)	All school gatherings and events can return to 100% capacity

Organizers should apply a trauma-informed lens to their planning, including consideration of:

- respecting student and staff comfort levels regarding personal space;
- using space available to spread people out as much as possible, respecting room occupancy limits, and ensuring enough space is available to prevent involuntarily physical contact between attendees (i.e. overcrowding); and
- gradual transitions to larger gatherings (e.g. school-wide assemblies), including starting with virtual or smaller in-person options, shorter in-person sessions, etc.

See the [Visitor Access/Community Use section](#) for more information on protocols for visitors.

Examinations or assessments are not considered school gatherings, however they must still be delivered in accordance with the health and safety guidelines outlined in this document.

## PERSONAL ITEMS

Staff and students can continue to bring personal items to school, but they should be encouraged to not share items that come in contact with the mouth (e.g. food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, vaping devices, wind instruments).

# Supporting Students With Disabilities/Diverse Abilities and/or Receiving Health Services

## EXPECTATIONS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

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

Most students with disabilities/diverse abilities or medical complexity are not considered at greater risk of experiencing severe illness from COVID-19. For guidelines specific to children with immune suppression (e.g. students who have had a recent organ transplant, who are receiving chemotherapy, those with an illness impacting their immune system), please refer to the [K-12 Education Recovery Plan](#) (p.5).

## 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 their standard risk assessment methods to determine what PPE is needed for general communicable disease prevention in accordance with routine practices. Additional personal protective equipment is not required beyond that used in their regular course of work (e.g., gloves for toileting).

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.

## Student Transportation

### 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 should clean their hands often, including before and after completing trips. Drivers are encouraged to regularly use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol during trips.

- Bus drivers, teachers and students in Kindergarten to Grade 12 may choose to wear masks or face coverings when they are on the bus.
- Parents and caregivers must assess their child daily for symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease before sending them to school (see the [Daily Health Check](#) section for more information). **If a child is sick, they must not take the bus or go to school.**
- Students should clean their hands before and after taking the bus.
- Spread passengers out if empty seats are available.
- Open windows when the weather permits.
- Bus drivers and students should be encouraged to practice [respiratory etiquette](#) while on the bus.

See the [Field Trips](#) section for more guidance about safety measures for field trips.

## OTHER METHODS OF TRANSPORTATION

For students, staff and visitors taking mass transit (e.g. municipal buses, SkyTrain, ferries, etc.), hand hygiene should be practiced before and after trips. Riders should follow any other safety guidance (including mask guidance) issued by the relevant transit authority.

Schools should continue to encourage methods of active transportation (e.g. walking, biking, skateboarding, etc.) wherever possible due to the overall health benefits.

# Cleaning and Disinfecting

Regular cleaning and disinfection are essential to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 from contaminated objects and surfaces.

## DEFINITIONS

**Cleaning:** the physical removal of visible soiling (e.g. dust, soil, blood, mucus). Cleaning removes, rather than kills, viruses and bacteria. It is done with water, detergents and steady friction from a cleaning cloth. All visibly soiled surfaces should be cleaned before being disinfected.

**Disinfection:** the killing of viruses and bacteria. A disinfectant is only applied to objects; never on the human body.

## PRODUCTS & PROCEDURES

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

For **disinfection**, use common, commercially available disinfectants such as ready-to-use disinfecting wipes and pre-made solutions (no dilution needed).

Schools should use commercial disinfectant products 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 children have 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 children.
- 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 and disinfect 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 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 include:

- Items used by larger numbers of students and staff, including doorknobs, light switches, hand railings, water fountains, faucet handles, toilet handles.
  - **School communicable disease plans should not include restricting access to water, washrooms or other spaces that support student learning and well-being (e.g. gymnasiums, libraries, support rooms, etc.). Schools should return to full operation of all spaces in alignment with the protocols outlined in this document.**
- Shared equipment (e.g. computer keyboards and tablets, glassware and testing equipment for science labs, kitchen equipment for culinary programs, sewing machines and sewing equipment for home economic programs, PE/sports equipment, music equipment, etc.)
- Appliances (staff and students can share the use of appliances and other objects, but treat items like microwaves, refrigerators, coffee pots, photocopiers or laminators as frequently touched surfaces)
- Service counters (e.g., office service window, 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.

There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted via textbooks, paper or other paper-based products. Laminated or glossy paper-based products (e.g. children's books or magazines) and items with plastic covers (e.g. DVDs) can be contaminated if handled by a person with COVID-19; however, the risk is low. There is no need for these items to be cleaned and disinfected or quarantined for any period of time, or for hand hygiene to be practiced before or after use.

## 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, Kevlar sleeves) for blood and bodily fluids (e.g. toileting, spitting, biting).

## LAUNDRY

Follow these procedures when doing laundry (Home Economics, Physical and Health Education, Life Skills Programs, etc.):

- Laundry should be placed in a laundry basket with a plastic liner.
- Do not shake dirty items
- Wearing gloves is optional. If choosing to wear gloves, ensure hand hygiene is performed before and after use. No other PPE is required.
- Clean hands with soap and water immediately after removing gloves.
  - Wash with regular laundry soap and hot water (60-90°C).

## Visitor Access/Community Use

Schools are responsible for ensuring that visitors are aware of communicable disease protocols and requirements, and have completed a daily health check, prior to entering the school.

- Information on communicable disease protocols and requirements for visitors should be posted by the entrance to the school, on the school's website and included in communications to students and families.

Schools can return to routine sign in/sign out practices for visitors and staff not typically onsite. Schools do not need to keep a list of the date, names and contact information of visitors for communicable disease prevention purposes.

Schools can return to routine pick up/drop off practices, though should still consider strategies to prevent crowding at pick-up and drop-off time. Parents/caregivers and other visitors should respect others' personal space while on school grounds, including outside.

After hours community use of facilities is allowed in alignment with other health and safety measures:

- Use must occur in line with those activities permitted as per relevant local, regional, provincial and federal public health recommendations and Orders
- Diligent hand hygiene
- Respiratory etiquette
- Ensuring participants stay home if they are feeling ill
- Where possible, limiting building access to only those areas required for the purpose of the activity

## Student Attendance

To maximize student attendance, repeated and consistent messaging/communication is crucial to convey to parents and caregivers that schools are lower risk and that health and safety measures continue to be in place in alignment with public health guidance. For more information, see the section on [Communications](#).

Additional guidance regarding students from First Nations communities, and students and parent/caregivers with immune compromise or medical complexity is available in the [K-12 Education Recovery Plan](#).

## Illness & Self-Assessment Policies and Protocols

### DAILY HEALTH CHECK

A daily health check is a tool to reduce the likelihood of a person with COVID-19 coming to school when they are infectious.

- Parents and caregivers should assess their children daily for illness before sending them to school.
  - Parents/caregivers and students can utilize the [Daily Health Check & What to Do When Sick](#) resource for daily assessment of symptoms.
  - Staff and other adults should complete a daily health check prior to entering the school.
  - If a student, staff or other adult is sick, they must not enter the school.

## SCHOOL AND SCHOOL DISTRICT RESPONSIBILITIES

School districts and independent school authorities must develop local protocols for schools and adult-only worksites/offices that:

- Ensure staff and other adults (e.g. parents, caregivers, visitors) entering the school/worksite are aware of their responsibility to complete a daily health check prior to entering the school/worksite (e.g. emails/letters to parents and staff, orientation video, signage on doors) and to stay home if they are sick.
- Clearly communicate with parents/caregivers their responsibility to complete a daily health check with their child, and keep them home from school if they are sick.
- Establish procedures for students and staff who become sick while at school/work and is unable to to be sent home as soon as possible.
  - 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 would like to wear one.
    - Schools must provide supervision for younger children. Supervising staff can choose to wear a mask and/or face shield, and should avoid touching bodily fluids as much as possible and practice diligent hand hygiene.
  - 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.
- Establish procedures that allow for students and staff to return to school/work in line with the guidance in the [Staying Home, Self-Isolation and Symptoms](#) section.
  - This is to ensure students and staff who are not sick are not kept out of school/away from work longer than necessary.

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.

## STAYING HOME, SELF-ISOLATION AND SYMPTOMS

### Stay Home When Required to Self-Isolate

Students, staff or other adults **must stay home if they are required to self-isolate.**

Additional information on self-isolation requirements and support is available from [BCCDC](#).



## Symptoms of Illness and Return to School

**Students, staff or other adults should stay at home when sick**, as this is one of the most important ways to reduce the introduction to and the spread of COVID-19 in schools. The following resources provide guidance regarding specific symptoms of illness:

- [When to get a COVID-19 test](#)
- [Daily Health Check & What To Do When Sick Tool](#)
- Staff, students and parents/caregivers can also use the BCCDC online [Self-Assessment Tool](#), call 8-1-1 or their health care provider.

When a staff, student or other adult can return to school depends on [if they have tested positive for COVID-19 and/or improvement of their symptoms](#). See [Appendix A – COVID-19 Symptoms, Testing & Return to School](#) for more information regarding what to do when experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.

Students and staff who experience symptoms consistent with a previously diagnosed health condition (e.g. seasonal allergies) can continue to attend school when they are experiencing these symptoms as normal. They do not require re-assessment by a health-care provider and should not be required to provide a health-care provider note. If they experience any new or unexplained symptoms, they should seek assessment by a health-care provider.

Students or staff may still attend school if a member of their household develops new symptoms of illness and/or has tested positive for COVID-19, provided the student/staff has no symptoms themselves. BCCDC has more information for those considered a [close contact](#), which are usually people from the same household.

## PROTOCOLS FOR MANAGING ILLNESS AND COVID-19 ACTIVITY AT SCHOOL

Refer to the [COVID-19 Protocols for School & District Administrators and Staff](#) for more information.

## 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 staff and students to practice hand hygiene:
  - Use portable hand-washing sites and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers containing at least 60% alcohol, where sinks are not available.
    - Schools should use [commercial hand sanitizer products that have met Health Canada's requirements and are authorized for sale in Canada](#).
  - Hand-washing should be encouraged upon school entry and before/after breaks and eating, using washroom and using [frequently touched](#) shared equipment.

- Promote the importance of diligent hand hygiene to staff and students regularly. For example, display hand hygiene posters [for students or adults](#) at handwashing sites.
- Ensure hand-washing supplies are always well stocked including soap, paper towels and where appropriate, alcohol-based hand rub with a minimum of 60% alcohol.
- Staff should assist younger students with hand hygiene as needed.
- 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.

## Respiratory Etiquette

Students and staff should:

- Cough and sneeze into their elbow, sleeve, or a tissue.
- Throw away used tissues and immediately perform hand hygiene.

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – 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.

## General Ventilation and Air Circulation

At this time, there is no evidence that a building's ventilation system, in good operating condition, would contribute to the spread of the virus. Good indoor air ventilation alone cannot protect people from exposure to COVID-19; however, it may reduce risk when used in addition to other preventive measures.

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](#)).

School districts and independent school authorities should regularly maintain HVAC systems for proper operation and ensure that:

- schools with recycled/recirculated air systems upgrade their current filters to a minimum MERV 13 filter or higher if possible; and
- schools with fresh air intake systems increase their average air exchanges as detailed on the [ASHRAE website](#) and the [Rocky Point Engineering Ltd website](#).

School district and site-based safety 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:

- moving activities outdoors when possible (for example, lunch, classes, physical activity) and consider moving classrooms outside when space and weather permit
- 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.

Use of portable air conditioners and fans in unventilated spaces with doors and windows closed should be avoided, except when necessary during high or excessive heat events. Communicable disease prevention measures need to be balanced against the risk of excessive heat events in warmer months. 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.

## Emergency and Evacuation Drills

Schools should continue to practice various emergency procedures, including six school fire evacuation drills required annually by [BC Fire Code 2.8.3.2](#), lockdown drills, etc.

- Staff should be notified in advance of emergency/evacuation drills.
- The BC Fire Code requires schools to conduct "total evacuation fire drills" involving all occupants in the building. Partial building evacuations involving smaller groups of students would not comply with the fire drill requirements of [BC Fire Code 2.8.3.2](#).
- Schools must continue to review their fire safety plans on a minimum annual basis, as per the BC Fire Code, to "ensure it takes account of the changes in use and other characteristics of the building" (such as pandemic-related protocols). Changes to school fire safety plans, including fire drill procedures, should be developed in cooperation with the local fire department.

- Emergency procedures may require modification to adhere to communicable disease plans (e.g. designating additional muster locations to reduce crowding where required, making efforts to minimize involuntary physical contact between participants, etc.). Schools may also need to consult with their local medical health officer for guidance on current public health Orders, which may affect site specific emergency and evacuation procedures.
  - In the event of an actual emergency, procedure modifications may be suspended to ensure for a timely, efficient and safe response.

## Communication and Training/Orientation

School districts and schools must clearly and consistently communicate guidance, recommendations and Orders from regional Medical Health Officers and the Provincial Health Officer (PHO), including COVID-19 resources. Ensure communication of communicable disease measures is relayed in multiple formats for ease of understanding (e.g., visual representation, videos using sign language, etc.).

As well, school districts and schools **must provide** health and safety orientations for staff (including newly hired staff and staff who change worksites), **and should also provide it to** parents/caregivers, students and other adults in the school (e.g. teacher candidates in practicums, volunteers) to ensure all members of the school community are well informed of their responsibilities and resources available. **Orientation** examples

School districts and independent school authorities **must** provide COVID-19 safety orientation opportunities for staff **when there are updates to communicable disease plans. These should be** in consultation with their local unions and staff health & safety representatives.

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. See the [Communicable Disease Plan Orientation Checklist](#) for considerations to support school districts and independent school authorities in planning their health & safety orientation for staff and students.

As per WorkSafeBC guidance, employers need to involve frontline workers, joint health and safety committees, and supervisors in identifying protocols for their workplace. School districts and independent

WorkSafeBC recommends that employers ensure the following:

- Everyone entering the workplace, including workers from other employers, have received information about the workplace's measures, practices, and policies for managing communicable disease.
- All workers understand the measures in place at the workplace.
- Supervisors are knowledgeable about the measures, practices, and policies in place, and incorporate these into supervision practices at the workplace.
- Workers know how to raise health and safety concerns.

school authorities **must** have active Site Committees and Joint Health and Safety Committees that meet **at least once each month** and **should be** included in school district/school planning efforts (e.g., **consult on COVID-19 safety orientation opportunities for staff**).

Site Committee and Joint Health and Safety Committee meetings should include discussion and review of resources available to staff through their local unions and/or Human Resource departments (e.g. Employee Assistance Program, Counselling Services, [BCTF Health and Wellness Program](#), CUPE Joint Early Intervention Program, etc).

Schools/districts can refer to the [BCCDC website](#), [B.C.'s COVID-19 Safe Schools website](#) and [Queen's Printer COVID-19 Signage Catalogue](#) for signage and posters.

## Curriculum, Programs and Activities

All curriculum, programs and activities should operate in alignment with these guidelines, including school-led activities held off campus<sup>5</sup> (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.

Equipment should be cleaned and disinfected as per [Cleaning and Disinfecting guidelines](#) outlined in this document.

- Equipment that touches the mouth (e.g. water bottles, instrument mouth pieces) should not be shared unless cleaned and disinfected in between use.

Hand hygiene should be practiced, including whenever hands are visibly dirty.

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<sup>5</sup> Students and staff are also required to follow the safety protocols required by the off-campus facility. Where there is a conflict, the safety protocols required by the off-campus facility should be followed.

## DUAL CREDIT

Students may earn “dual credit” [towards graduation by enrolling in and successfully completing courses at specific post-secondary institutions.](#)

- For students taking dual credit courses taken in secondary schools, the guidelines outlined in this document apply.
- For students taking dual credit courses in post-secondary institutions, schools must ensure students are aware of and adhere to the communicable disease plans set out by post-secondary institutions. Information on COVID-19 measures in post-secondary institutions can be found on the [B.C. Government website](#) and on individual institution websites.

## 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:

- For transportation, including school bus transportation and public transit, see guidance in the [transportation section](#) in this document.
- Schools must ensure that volunteers providing supervision are trained in and strictly adhere to required health and safety guidelines.
- Alignment with **applicable** local, regional, provincial and federal public health recommendations and Orders, including for international travel.
- 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).**

## FOOD / CULINARY PROGRAMS

Schools can continue to include food preparation as part of learning programs for students. The following guidelines should be applied:

### Food Safety

- In the case of food and culinary programs, where food is prepared as part of learning and is consumed by the students who prepared it, the following health and safety measures should apply:
  - Continue to follow normal food safety measures and requirements

- Implement the cleaning and disinfecting measures outlined in the [Cleaning and Disinfecting](#) section of this document
- [FOODSAFE](#) Level 1 covers important food safety and worker safety information including foodborne illness, receiving and storing food, preparing food, serving food, and cleaning and sanitizing. It is a helpful resource for those seeking education and training on food safety practices

### Hand Hygiene and Cleaning Protocols

- Students and staff should practice diligent hand hygiene, including washing their hands in alignment with normal food safety measures and requirements.
- Refer to the [Cleaning and Disinfecting](#) section for cleaning/disinfecting protocols.
- For laundry, follow the instructions provided in the [Cleaning and Disinfecting](#) section of these guidelines.

## FOOD SERVICES

Schools can continue to provide food services, including for sale.

Some schools offer food services that are regulated under the [Food Premises Regulation](#). These are typically cafeterias, though may include some meal programs.

- If food service is provided in schools that is regulated under the Food Premises Regulation, no additional measures beyond those articulated in this document and regular requirements as outlined in the regulation need to be implemented (e.g. a FOODSAFE trained staff member, a food safety plan, etc.).
- [Food Safety Legislation](#) and the [Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in B.C. Schools](#) continue to apply as relevant.

For food contact surfaces, schools should ensure any sanitizers or disinfectants used are approved for use in a food service application and are appropriate for use against COVID-19. These may be different than the products noted in this document for general cleaning and disinfection. Additional information is available on the [BCCDC website](#).

Schools can continue to accept food donations to support learning and the delivery of meal programs, breakfast clubs and other food access initiatives.

School meal programs should follow regular operating practices.

## FUNDRAISERS

Schools can continue to offer fundraisers that can be implemented in line with the guidelines outlined in this document. If the fundraisers involve the sale of food items, they should also align with the [Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in B.C. Schools](#).

## 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 PROGRAMS

- Shared equipment should be cleaned and disinfected as per [Cleaning and Disinfecting guidelines](#) and students should be encouraged to practice proper hand hygiene before and after music equipment use.
  - Equipment that touches the mouth (e.g. instrument mouth pieces) should not be shared unless cleaned and disinfected in between uses.
- The B.C. Music Educators' Association and the Coalition for Music Education in B.C have also developed [Guidance for Music Classes in BC During COVID-19](#). 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.

## SHARED OFFICE SPACE FOR STAFF

- The guidelines in this document should be used to determine what measures should be in place within staff-only spaces within a school (e.g. break rooms, school office).
- [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.).

## PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION (PHE)/OUTDOOR PROGRAMS

- Spread out students and staff within available space, and encourage outdoor activities and programs, as much as possible.
- Shared equipment can be used, provided it is cleaned and disinfected as per the guidelines in the [Cleaning and Disinfecting section](#) of this document.
  - Students should be encouraged to practice proper hand hygiene before and after using frequently touched pieces of equipment (e.g. before and after a sports game using a shared ball), as well as proper [respiratory etiquette](#).
  - Equipment that touches the mouth (e.g. water bottles) should not be shared unless cleaned and disinfected in between uses.



## PLAYGROUNDS

There is no current evidence of COVID-19 transmission in playground environments. Playgrounds are a safe environment. The following measures should be taken when using playgrounds:

- Ensure appropriate hand hygiene practices before and after outdoor play
- Sand and water can be used for play if children wash their hands before and after play. COVID-19 does not survive well on surfaces, other than hard surfaces. There is no evidence showing that the virus survives on sand, in water or on playdough.

## 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 normal. There is no need to clean, disinfect or quarantine 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.

## SCHOOL SPORTS

- Intra- and inter-school programs, activities (e.g. intramurals, sports team practices, games), sports academies and events can continue in alignment with [the guidance within this document](#) and the following:
  - Capacity should follow that outlined within the [School Gatherings and Events section](#).
- Sport activities should be held outside whenever possible.
- See the [Visitor Access/Community Use section](#) for more information on protocols for spectators.

## TRADES IN TRAINING PROGRAMS

- Ongoing collaboration and communication with post-secondary institutions for Trades in Training or other pre-trades apprenticeship programs is crucial.
  - Ensure that staff and students in the K-12 school and the post-secondary institution are aware of communicable disease prevention measures in place.
  - Diligent student self-assessment of health when transitioning between the secondary school and post-secondary institution.

- Given the unique structure of Trades Training Programs and oversight by the Industry Training Authority (ITA), new information on assessments and programming for these courses is available online.
  - Information for workers is available on the WorkSafeBC [Communicable Disease Prevention](#) webpage, including [COVID-19 and communicable disease information for workers](#).

## THEATRE, FILM, AND DANCE PROGRAMS

- Intra- and inter-school programs, activities and events (e.g., plays, concerts) can continue in alignment with the guidance within this document and the following:
  - Capacity should follow that outlined within the [School Gatherings and Events section](#).
- Shared equipment such as set pieces, props, cameras etc. should be cleaned and disinfected as per [cleaning and disinfecting guidelines](#) in this document and students should be encouraged to practice proper hand hygiene before and after using frequently touched pieces of equipment.

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Employers will need to follow current guidelines from the [Provincial Health Officer](#) and [WorkSafeBC](#). Students can still engage in work placements in accordance with the following guidance:

- Schools and school districts must ensure students are covered with the required, valid workplace insurance for placements at standard worksites and follow WorkSafeBC guidelines.
  - Information for workers is available on the WorkSafeBC [Communicable Disease Prevention](#) webpage, including [COVID-19 and communicable disease information for workers](#).
- For current and any new placements, standards in the ministry [Work Experience Program Guide](#) must be followed. (*Note: As part of setup and monitoring, worksite visits can now be conducted virtually if needed.*)
- Schools and school districts will assess and determine if it is safe for their students to continue with existing work placements or to begin new placements, considering [Provincial Health Officer](#) and [WorkSafeBC](#) guidance regarding COVID-19. To ensure awareness and support for placements under these conditions, it is recommended that school districts and schools obtain parent/guardian sign-off for all new and continuing placements..
- Students and support workers who accompany special needs students to work sites, life skills course and locations, etc., will adhere to the communicable disease prevention plan of the workplace including wearing PPE if required.

## Extracurricular Activities

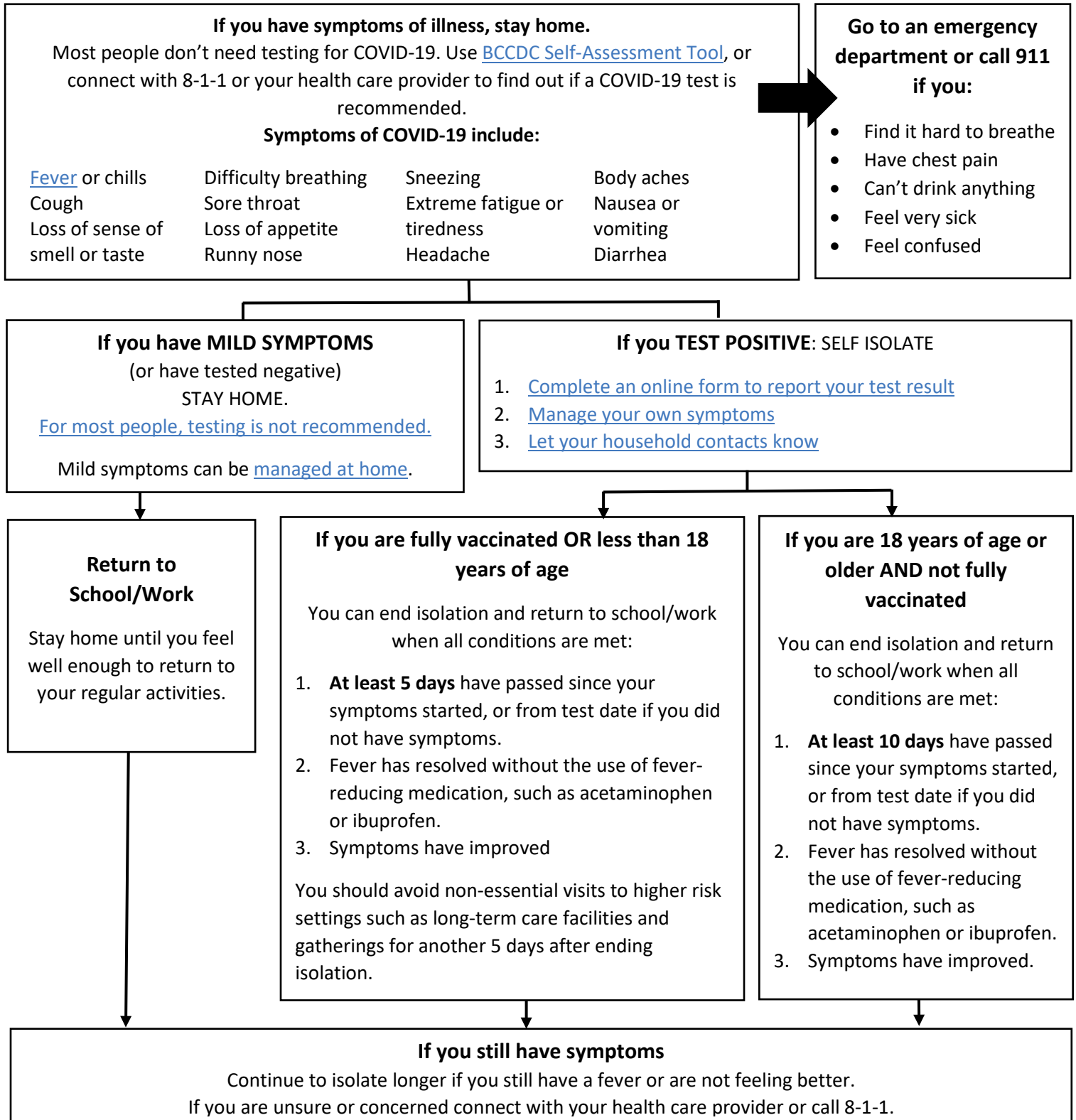
Intra- and inter-school extracurricular activities and special interest clubs can occur in alignment with the guidelines in this document and requirements of applicable local, regional and provincial public health recommendations and Orders for community gatherings and events.

## Appendix A: COVID-19 Symptoms, Testing & Return to School

When a student, staff or other adult can return to school depends on if they have tested positive for COVID-19. The table on the next page is summarized from BCCDC and is accurate as of March, 2022. Staff, students and parents/caregivers can also use the BCCDC online [Self-Assessment Tool](#), or call 8-1-1 or their health care provider when they are experiencing symptoms of illness.

BCCDC provides information about COVID-19, including what to do if a person suspects they have the virus, and what actions to take based on a [COVID-19 test result](#).

## Summary: What To Do When Sick



### What to do if someone is sick in your household:

You can continue to attend school if someone in your household is sick and/or self-isolating as long as you do not have any symptoms of illness and feel well. This includes if they have tested positive for COVID-19. Ensure you closely monitor yourself (or your child) for symptoms of illness and stay home if you feel unwell. The best way to protect yourself and your family from COVID-19 is to get vaccinated. Vaccines are available for anyone ages 5 and up. Register now at: [Getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca](http://Getvaccinated.gov.bc.ca)

# Appendix B: Communicable Disease Plan Orientation Checklist

This checklist is intended to support school districts and independent school authorities in planning ongoing communicable disease orientation for staff (including newly hired staff and staff who changed worksites), other adults (including volunteers and teacher candidates in practicums) and students. Orientation sessions should provide a comprehensive overview of the key principles and guidelines outlined in the resources listed below, as well as information on how these principles and guidelines will be implemented at the school level:

- [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#)
- [Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)
- [WorkSafeBC Communicable Disease Prevention: A Guide for Employers](#)
- School/district communicable disease plan

Schools and school districts should ensure their Joint Health and Safety Committee is established prior to the orientation session. At the beginning of the school year **and whenever district/school communicable disease plans change**, schools/school districts are encouraged to hold Joint Health and Safety Committee meetings more frequently to help identify and address any safety concerns in a timely manner.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

- Adopt a trauma-informed approach:
  - where possible, have an employee trained in trauma-informed practice deliver some of the orientation
  - conduct needs-based assessments and regular 'check-ins' after the orientation session, and provide contact information to students/staff for requesting additional supports
  - provide information on how to access counselling services during school start up
  - for staff: consider sharing the [Building Compassionate Communities in a New Normal](#) webinar link. This free webinar developed by the Ministry of Education is intended to provide teachers, education assistants, and administrators with information, ideas and strategies that they can use to create compassionate spaces for students.
- Highlight the process used to develop the school/district plan (e.g., alignment with provincial direction, engagement at the local level) and the provincial guidelines:
  - The Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings have been developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the BC Centre for Disease Control, Indigenous rightsholders and education partners, including district/school leaders, teachers, support staff, and parents.

- These guidelines are based on the public health guidance developed by the Office of the Provincial Health Officer and the BC Centre for Disease Control.
- Discuss the importance of implementing communicable disease prevention measures that promote equity and inclusion, and outline how these principles are reflected in the school/district plan
- Review the provincial K-12 guidelines and school/district plan, and describe what a school day will look like with the new guidelines (e.g. interactions between peers and staff, traffic flow throughout the school, transition time, recess/lunch, etc.)
- Outline how prevention and exposure control measures are being implemented in schools to ensure student and staff safety (see the [Infection Prevention and Exposure Control Measures](#) section for more information)
- Discuss measures for gatherings and events; provide opportunities for staff and students to put forward alternatives to continue to support events in a different format if needed (e.g., virtual events)
- Discuss preparation for potential transitions (e.g. regional public health order)
- Review school emergency and evacuation procedures (e.g., fire drill) considering relevant guidelines (see the [Emergency and Evacuation Drills](#) section for more information)
- Outline individual responsibilities (e.g., daily health check, stay home if sick, etc.) and remind everyone to do their part (e.g., practice diligent hand hygiene on a regular basis)
- Outline measures in place to support students and staff who are immune compromised
- Implement strategies to ensure staff and students who cannot attend orientation are made aware of communicable disease protocols (e.g., provide a booklet/a video on communicable disease plans)
- Provide enough time and space for staff, students and families to review the school/district communicable disease plan, ask questions, and provide input; provide contact information for any future questions that may arise
- Describe the process to address concerns and suggestions regarding the communicable disease plan (e.g., suggestions to support continuous improvement)
- Outline the process in place to assess and revise the school/district safety plan on an ongoing basis as well as how staff, students and families will be made aware of any changes in the plan
- Communicate proactively and on an ongoing basis about the changes made to policies, practices, and procedures to ensure staff, students and families are informed in a timely manner
- Provide a list of resources and links for more information (e.g., [BCCDC resources](#), [resources from the Government of Canada](#), guidelines developed by provincial associations, [Ministry-developed trauma-informed practice resources](#) or other resources such as [videos from the BC Health Emergency Services](#))

#### **CONSIDERATIONS SPECIFIC TO STAFF**

- Walk staff (administrators, teachers, teachers teaching on call, support staff, itinerant staff, etc.) through changes to communicable disease plans when they occur

- If appropriate, consider involving school staff representatives in the delivery of information pertaining to specific area of expertise
- Ensure orientation includes specific communicable disease protocols for itinerant staff and specialists (e.g., teachers teaching on call, counsellors, education assistants, teacher candidates)
- Include itinerant staff as well as on call and auxiliary staff in orientation sessions
- Implement strategies to ensure staff who work at multiple sites are made aware of communicable disease protocols in each of the sites (e.g., provide a booklet/a video on communicable disease plans for different schools)
- Share procedures and contact information in case of emergencies
- Introduce members of the Joint Health and Safety Committee or any other safety representative (along with their contact information) and outline the committee/representative's role in helping maintain a healthy and safe workplace
- Outline existing processes to address requests, concerns or accommodations related to communicable disease prevention measures.