

WELCOMING OUR STUDENTS BACK: RESTORING SAFE SCHOOLS

COVID-19 K–12 School Settings
Practice Guidance and Protocols

August 24, 2020

A Guide for Parents, Caregivers and Students: What to expect when welcomed back to school.

Restoring Safe Schools

Our shared goal: Kindergarten to Grade 12 students return to school with as much in-class learning as possible, while staying safe.

Our planning puts your child's health and safety first, along with teachers, staff and families within the school community. Specific safety procedures will be in place for each part of your child's school day from the moment students board the school bus to when they arrive at and leave the school.

Here's how:

1. Physical distancing will be practiced to the fullest extent possible in all parts of the school throughout the school day. This will include (but is not limited to): controlling the way students enter and exit the school at designated entrances, one-way or marked hallways, leaving space between desks and tables, staggering start and end-times for recess and lunchtime, timetabling to avoid spares, and limiting bathroom occupancy at any given time.
2. Where two metres physical distancing not possible, students will be in distinct cohorts (groups), separate from other students, to reduce the risk of virus transmission throughout the school day.
3. Masks offer an added layer of protection, especially for indoor public spaces where physical distancing cannot be maintained. At this time, non-medical masks are required in schools for students in Grades 4 to 12 as well as teachers, staff and visitors, when physical distancing of two metres is not possible. Parents and caregivers will choose whether younger students, Grade 3 and under, should wear a mask.
4. Masks are required on school buses for all students in Grades 4 through 12 and for the driver. Boarding and exiting the bus will be done with physical distancing and assigned seats.
5. Schools will provide masks to students and staff who need them throughout the school year.
6. Resources to help children, along with their parents and caregivers, learn how to safely put on, wear and remove a mask are being developed.
7. Guidance on exceptions regarding specific mask-free time, and for those not recommended to wear a mask, will be available soon.
8. Extra handwashing and sanitizing stations will be set up and monitored to ensure students utilize them.
9. Special attention will be paid to younger students to ensure they follow all safety procedures, such as wearing a mask and keeping their hands washed and sanitized.
10. All parents will be reminded regularly that students must stay home when sick or exhibiting any symptoms of a cold, flu, or COVID-19.
11. Increased cleaning and disinfecting will occur around the school and throughout the day, especially high touch surfaces.
12. Any incident of COVID-19 in a school will result in immediate contact by Public Health with instructions if that student and/or cohort must self-isolate, if they need to be tested and when they can return to school.

How can parents/caregivers help keep students and schools safe?

Screen for symptoms every morning:

Check every morning. If your child has COVID-19 or flu related symptoms, keep them at home.

An up-to-date list of symptoms can be found at: <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/updates/about.html>

Use the [Self-Assessment tool](#) to check if your child should be tested for COVID-19. Call Health Links at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 if you notice symptoms or if you need more information. Screening information will be sent home for you to reference at the start of each day.

If your child develops symptoms at school, they will be isolated and parents/caregivers will be called. Please pick your child up promptly. Make sure the school has your current contact information and a back up to call if you can't be reached.

Physically distance

Keep a safe distance during drop offs and pick ups. Avoid visits to the school. Please email or call the teacher or school administrator when you need to talk.

To keep numbers low on buses we are asking parents and caregivers to drive their students to school instead of the school bus if possible. Talk to your school bus coordinator.

Pack a mask and encourage your child to wear it especially in common areas and when physically distancing is not possible.

Be prepared to talk about COVID-19

Provide reassurance to children and youth about their personal safety and health. Telling children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting. Reassure them about their safety and explain there are many things they can do to stay healthy.

For more information on talking to children about COVID-19, please visit:

UNICEF: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-covid-19-school-return>

World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/healthy-parenting/english-tip-6-covid-19-parenting.pdf?sfvrsn=232558c1_8

Students: What to expect?

Back to school will look different but your teachers and principals are excited to have you back. They are working hard to make sure schools are ready. Your school will help explain the changes. Here are some of the big differences:

- When arriving at school, moving in the hallways and eating lunch, teachers and staff will be helping students spread out and remember to physically distance.
- Students may be asked to stay in their own group/cohort to decrease contact with others. (A cohort is a group of students who stay together, mostly for the classroom but can be increased to 75 for recess and other activities).
- All students can wear a mask. Students in Grade 4 and above are required to wear a non-medical mask for indoor public spaces and when 2 metres of physical distancing cannot be maintained. Teachers and staff will have masks too. Masks will be available at school and on the bus if you do not have one.
- Students may be asked to sit in the same seat every day, especially on the bus.
- For high school you likely will have days you are learning at home. Follow the class schedule and talk to your teacher if you need extra support. Learning, assessment and marking will continue for all.
- As the situation is changing, your teachers, principals, parents and caregivers may provide new information throughout the school year.

Here are some ways to stay safe and healthy:

- Stay home when you are sick. Watch for symptoms.
- Tell staff, parents and caregivers when you are not feeling well.
- Wash your hands especially after coughing, blowing noses or sneezing, and when handling food.
- Do not share food or personal items.
- Cough and sneeze into your arm or tissue. Do not touch your face, particularly your eyes, nose and mouth
- Keep two metres of distance from others and avoid close contact. Think of a bike in between you and others.
- Instead of giving high fives, fist pumps or hugs, smile and wave to say hello.
- Stay healthy by eating healthy foods, keeping physically active, getting enough sleep and fresh air.
- Ask questions. It is ok to talk about your concerns and fears. We are all in this together.

Have more questions?

More information on Manitoba Education's COVID-19 response, including resources, planning documents, and Frequently Asked Questions, can be found at [Latest COVID-19 Education News](#).

You can also visit EngageMB at <https://engagemb.ca/welcoming-our-students-back-restoring-safe-schools> to ask your questions. We'll share your question and the answer for others to see. Questions can also be answered privately, if they are not appropriate for sharing.

[My Learning at Home](#) is a resource to assist families to support their children in remote learning from home.

Current information about COVID-19 in Manitoba can be found at <http://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/>.

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Updates

August 13, 2020

Given the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and transmission within our communities, guidance may change based on emerging circumstances and information from public health officials. **If the public health situation changes or guidelines are not sufficient, current measures may be paused and other measures may be introduced or reintroduced.**

This document outlines practice guidance and protocols to support [Welcoming Our Students Back: Restoring Safe Schools – K–12 Guidelines for September 2020](#), which was released on July 30. This practice guidance is intended to support school administrators in implementing public health measures and Manitoba Education directives.

Parents and caregivers can also review to better understand protocols and what to expect for when students return to school.

All updates will be highlighted in this Updates section and integrated into the document. School divisions and funded independent schools will receive notification of any changes.

For more information on COVID-19, please visit <http://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/> or Manitoba Education's Latest COVID-19 Education News website at <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html> for the [latest news](#) and for [frequently asked questions](#).

August 21, 2020

Summary of Updates

- Mandatory use of non-medical masks for students in Grades 4 to 12, as well as teachers, staff and visitors where two meters of distancing is not possible.
- Mandatory use of non-medical masks on school buses for students in Grades 4 to 12, as well as the driver.
- Guidance on use of masks, including how to put on and remove a mask, as well as exceptions.
- Further clarification on the suspension to the community use of schools.
- Clarification on offering cafeteria services and food handling.

August 13, 2020

Original Version

September 2020

In-class learning will resume on Sept. 8, 2020, for all students in public and funded independent schools (FIS) across the province.

- Kindergarten to Grade 8 students will return for five days of full, in-class instruction per week.
- Students in Grades 9 to 12 will return for up to five days per week of in-class instruction if high schools can effectively implement physical distancing and the use of cohorts. Students should expect some remote learning, along with in-class instruction.
- Students with special needs in all grades will return for five days of full, in-class instruction per week.

Teachers and staff will return to schools on September 2, providing them with an opportunity for orientation to public health requirements and the educational priorities to support students, as well as for professional learning around recovery learning.

Early detection and proactive measures to minimize the risk of transmission will assist with limiting the impact of a case within the school, and help prevent disruption of in-class learning and restricted access to the school. Re-entry plans must follow provincial public health measures, along with learning and school day structure guidance, to ensure student achievement and success.

Division-level re-entry plans will be finalized by August 17, 2020, and posted on the division website, and they will be accessible to the school community. The Manitoba Education website will have links to the various plans. The plans will outline:

- the school day structure and learning plan
- how the school division will ensure public health orders and guidance are followed
- how the school division will address the mental health and well-being of the school community, including teachers, staff, students and families
- how information will be communicated to students, staff and families

Schools will communicate directly and frequently with families to provide them with information about the school year and ongoing plans for instruction and supports.

Manitoba Education will continue to work closely with public health, education stakeholders, schools, divisions, independent schools, parents, caregivers and students to further develop plans for the coming year. The Provincial K–12 COVID-19 Response Planning Team will continue to work together, and regular conference calls will be held with education sector representatives.

Public Health Measures

Understanding Transmission

COVID-19 is most commonly spread from an infected person through respiratory droplets generated through coughing, sneezing, laughing, singing and talking. It spreads more easily when contact is close (within six feet or two metres) and prolonged (more than 15 minutes). COVID-19 can also be spread by close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands, or touching something with the virus on it and then touching one's mouth, nose, or eyes before cleaning one's hands. Some people who have few or no symptoms can spread COVID-19.

Although public health measures can significantly reduce the risk of COVID-19 entering and being transmitted in child care and school settings, the risk is never zero. It is important to remember that children tend to have less severe illness from the disease, this is not always the case. COVID-19 can cause more severe illness among people who are 60 years of age and older, and among those who have weakened immune systems or underlying medical conditions. Children under one year of age and those with immune suppression and chronic medical conditions are considered more vulnerable and at higher risk for severe illness. Parents, guardians and staff are encouraged to consult with their health-care provider if they have concerns about their own health, their child's health, or the health of other household contacts.

The most effective measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 include separating people by maintaining physical distance and the use of physical barriers. However, these measures are not always practical in child care and school settings. Therefore, it is most effective to use a layered approach, including multiple measures from the areas listed below, and to develop administrative measures that support individuals to consistently follow personal preventive practices (e.g., environmental cleaning and conducting frequent hand hygiene) that decrease the number of interactions while increasing the safety of interactions that occur. Adapted responses and recommendations may be required in situations where health, age, ability, status, or other socio-economic and demographic circumstances may limit the ability of some groups or individuals to follow the recommended measures.

Note: All options should be considered to support the implementation of public health measures, including leveraging volunteers to support staff and administrators where needed. This may include parents, volunteers and student leaders. The public health measures outlined in these protocols must be followed for all of these individuals, even if not specifically indicated.

Staying Home When Sick

Individuals should self-isolate and not enter schools or education facilities if they:

- are experiencing symptoms suggestive of COVID-19
- have travelled outside Manitoba in the previous 14 days (outside of areas excluded by public health orders, which currently exclude locations in Western Canada, the territories, and Ontario west of Terrace Bay)
- are a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19
- are awaiting a COVID-19 test result (excluding persons tested as part of voluntary asymptomatic surveillance for COVID-19, as they do not need to isolate)

An up-to-date list of symptoms can be found at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/about/index.html>.

Screening

Screening for symptoms is critical to identify any potential cases of COVID-19 as quickly as possible before exposure to others. If someone is unsure whether they or their child should be tested and self-isolate, they should be directed to the COVID-19 Screening Tool at <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>.

All screening that identifies suspected cases of COVID-19 should be referred to Health Links – Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257.

Symptom and exposure screening must occur at the start of each day.

- Staff must self-monitor daily for signs and symptoms of COVID-19. Staff who have any symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home, isolate, and be excluded from work. Schools must maintain records of staff absenteeism.
- Schools must communicate that parents and caregivers need to monitor their child daily for symptoms and exposures before sending them to school. Parents and caregivers are responsible for ensuring their children are not displaying symptoms before sending them to school or on the bus. Schools can also support children with self-screening upon arrival at school.

Signage, with exclusion criteria, must be posted at all entrances to the school.

A student or staff member who meets any of the exclusion criteria will not be admitted to the school and will be advised to immediately isolate and consult Health Links – Info Santé or their health-care provider. Those with symptoms should be tested. If the test is negative for COVID-19, they can return 24 hours after symptoms resolve. If individuals do not get tested, they should isolate for 14 days from symptom onset, and they may return if symptoms have resolved at that time.

A chronic stable cough, sneeze, runny nose or nasal congestion that is unchanged and clearly linked to a known medical condition such as asthma or allergies, is not an absolute requirement for exclusion. As well, children who are crying can exhibit a runny nose. Changing or worsening of chronic symptoms require isolation and contacting Health Links – Info Santé. Staff should

exercise judgment based on the symptoms, but when in doubt, err on the side of caution by excluding the child and advising the parent or caregiver to contact Health Links – Info Santé or their health-care provider.

Routine screening or monitoring of temperatures with a thermometer or other device to assess for fever is not recommended. Normal temperatures can vary throughout the day and can be different between individuals. It is recommended that parents and staff focus on monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19, as outlined in the Screening Tool and poster at <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool>.

Visitor Access

Visitors or volunteers are permitted at schools, but visits should be minimized to the greatest extent possible. Where possible, online communication, video, and telephone should be used to interact with families, rather than in person.

Parents, caregivers, healthcare providers, volunteers and other non-staff adults (e.g., visitors) entering the school should be prioritized to those supporting implementation of public health measures and activities that benefit student learning and well-being (e.g., teacher candidates, immunizers, meal program volunteers, etc.). This should also be limited to those who regularly volunteer to minimize the number of possible exposures.

All visitors and volunteers must adhere to self-screening, physical distancing, and recommended hygiene practices. At this time, non-medical masks are required in schools for visitors when physical distancing of two metres is not possible. Visitors with any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should not enter the school. Schools are required to keep a list of all visitors.

Community use of schools will be suspended, with the exception of child care centres operating in schools. School divisions and schools will need to assess their capacity to accommodate nursery, before and after, and other education programming (e.g., driver training) while prioritizing in-class instruction and public health measures. Independent schools with shared space rental agreements will need to ensure that public health measures are followed if the owners of the buildings utilize space that is also used for the school's purposes.

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing of two metres or six feet between all individuals should occur whenever reasonably possible in a school setting.

The maximum number of individuals congregating (i.e., close interactions among people longer than 15 minutes) in a common space for indoor and outdoor settings must comply with the most up-to-date public health orders at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/soe.html#current>.

- Where possible, arrange spaces to encourage the recommended separation. For example, space children to avoid close contact and assign a designated chair and table for each child.
- Schools must manage the flow of people in common areas, including hallways, to minimize crowding and allow for the ease of people passing through. Young children need easy-to-understand visual prompts. For example, use tape on the floor, hoops, mats, or other items that can mark off personal space. Another idea is to organize play activities with a visual cue about how many children should be in that area (e.g., two chairs next to an activity with markers or numbers taped to the floor).

- Implement the practice of staggered entrance and exit times, or use separate entrances (if feasible).
- Avoid close greetings (e.g., hugs and handshakes).
- Stagger staff break times and avoid large, in-person staff meetings.
- Assemblies and gatherings are discouraged, and those that exceed public health advice may not be scheduled.
- Physical barriers can be used, where appropriate, when physical distancing cannot be maintained. This includes plexiglass barriers for high-traffic areas, such as reception desks and check-out counters. These must be implemented with a plan for frequent cleaning and sanitizing for infection prevention and control.
- Fire drills and lock-down requirements must be considered within the COVID-19 environment, as current procedures are not conducive to physical distancing. Modifications of drills to achieve goals should be considered.

Cohorts/Groups

It is recognized that strict physical distancing at all times—particularly with young children - is not practical in the school setting. When physical distancing is not possible, cohorts can be used to limit exposure and facilitate contact tracing if a case is identified. Students will likely be a part of multiple cohorts from within and outside of the school setting. The purpose of cohorts is to limit the mixing of students and staff so that, if a child or employee develops an infection, there are fewer possible exposures and contact tracing can be more easily done.

Cohorts involve keeping groups of students (e.g., classes) together and avoiding interactions with other groups.

- Physical distancing within the cohort is required to the greatest extent possible, including a minimum of one-metre separation between students in the cohort when seated at desks or tables.
- Maximum cohort size is to be no more than 75 students. There is no limit on the number of cohorts in a school, as long as distinct cohorts of 75 can be separated to prevent contact with other groups. Each cohort must be able to arrive, depart, and participate in school activities without co-mingling with members from other cohorts as much as possible.
- Whenever possible, keep children and staff together with the same cohort throughout the day, including lunch breaks and recesses. Locations of classrooms, use of additional space, and timetabling by cohorts can all be considered to reduce mixing.
- Stagger schedules and movement of cohorts to avoid being in shared spaces (e.g., foyers, hallways) at the same time.
- Different cohorts/groups should not be in shared spaces at the same time. Where this is not possible, physical distancing between groups is required. It is important to maintain at least four metres between groups or cohorts of children (i.e., two groups of children can be in the same area, provided the groups do not intermingle and four metres of space is maintained between the two groups).

- Avoid the movement of classes of students where possible. It is preferable that teachers move between classrooms instead of students.
- Keep daily records that include the names of students, staff and volunteers of cohorts.

Ventilation

There is less likelihood of transmission in well ventilated environments. Consider the following strategies:

- Avoid recirculation of air to the greatest extent possible, and ensure filters are clean.
- In general, ventilating indoor environments with fresh air—whether by increasing the outdoor air ratio of the HVAC system settings as much as possible or by opening windows and avoiding or reducing recirculation—will dilute the air exhaled by the occupants, including any infectious particles. Even if this is not feasible for the whole facility, consider this for higher risk areas (e.g., where crowding may be an issue).
- Minimize the use of fans and limit them to the lowest settings if they are needed. Direct air flow away from people and surfaces. Ensure that these surfaces are cleaned along with other high-touch surfaces.
- Assess the risk of opening windows and doors (i.e., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms). Do not prop open fire doors to increase ventilation or to reduce exposure to frequently touched door handles.

Transportation to Schools

Physical distancing and/or cohorts are also required in school transportation. For more information, refer to the Guidelines for Transportation to Schools at <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/reopening/transportation.html>.

To support physical distancing on buses, to the greatest extent possible, parents are encouraged to transport their own children if they are able. Active transportation, such as walking and biking, should also be encouraged. For advice on carpooling, please visit <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/transportation.html>.

Hygiene Practices

Handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is the recommended hand hygiene practice. Staff and students must engage in frequent hand hygiene, including at the following times:

- the start of the day and before going home
- before and after recess
- after going to the washroom and helping children with washroom routines
- after a diaper change (both children and staff)
- before and after preparing food
- before eating or drinking

- after getting hands dirty
- after wiping nose or handling dirty tissues
- after coughing, sneezing or blowing nose
- after soothing a crying child
- before and after putting on and taking off a mask
- before and after being on a bus
- after cleaning tasks (staff)

School staff should help young children to ensure handwashing is done correctly.

Where possible, encourage and supervise hand hygiene and make alcohol-based hand sanitizer available at all building access points and throughout the facility. Young children require supervision when using alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Good hygiene practices can be taught in an age-appropriate and playful manner. One idea is to have timers to help ensure students wash for an adequate time. See how many 20-second songs the children can identify. Be creative—engage the children in coming up with games and other ways to encourage everyone to wash their hands for 20 seconds.

Respiratory etiquette should be modelled, taught and reinforced regularly. This includes coughing and sneezing into a tissue or sleeve, as well as properly and promptly disposing of any used tissues, and exercising proper hand hygiene.

Personal items (e.g., hats, hair accessories, lip balm, food and drinks) should not be shared.

Avoid touching one's mouth, nose or eyes, and encourage children to do the same.

As part of these routine measures, signage should be posted and highly visible, and it should include visual cues that remind staff and children to perform hand hygiene (e.g., sneezing or coughing into their elbow, putting used tissues in a waste receptacle, and washing hands or using hand sanitizer immediately after using tissues). Several printable resources, including posters and factsheets, are available online at the following websites:

- <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/resources/index.html>
- <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/providers/posters/>

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Non-medical masks can play a role in reducing the transmission of COVID-19. Wearing non-medical masks is an **additional** personal practice that can help to prevent the infectious respiratory droplets of an unknowingly infected person (the wearer) from coming into contact with other people. Non-medical masks have not been tested to meet any standards. Although required, for school staff, visitors and students in Grades 4 to 12 when physical distancing of two metres cannot be maintained, wearing a non-medical mask or face covering is not a substitute for physical distancing and handwashing. Those wearing masks should be reminded, in age-appropriate language, not to touch their mask and to comply with other personal preventive practices, such as frequent hand hygiene and physical distancing as much as possible.

At this time, non-medical masks are required in schools for students in Grades 4 to 12 as well as staff and visitors, when physical distancing of two metres is not possible. This includes hallways, when riding the bus to school, and it may include classroom settings.

- Students (Grade 4 and up), teachers, staff, visitors and volunteers are required to wear non-medical masks in areas where physical distancing of two metres is not possible.
- Students under Grade 4 can also use non-medical masks. Parents and caregivers will choose whether younger students should wear a mask.

Masks are required on school buses for all students in Grades 4 through 12 and for the driver.

Masks should be put on before loading and taken off after offloading, if removal is appropriate for the setting. Schools will provide masks to students and staff who need them. Inventory will be monitored to ensure adequate supply.

Non-medical masks should not be worn by anyone who:

- is unable to remove the mask without assistance (e.g., due to age, ability or developmental status)
- has breathing difficulties
- is under two years of age

When a non-medical mask is used, your hands should be cleaned before and after putting it on and taking it off. Follow the recommendations listed above for the use of non-medical masks, including for their removal. Removed masks are considered contaminated and should be placed in a container or bag for appropriate cleaning and disinfection at a later time. Non-medical masks should be laundered daily.

A medical mask (surgical or procedural mask) is required when unable to maintain a distance of two metres or six feet from a child who is exhibiting signs or symptoms suggestive of COVID-19.

To put on a mask safely, perform hand hygiene by handwashing with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Place the mask on your face carefully so it covers your mouth and nose, handling it with the strings or elastic ear loops as much as possible, and mould the nose bridge to ensure it does not move while it is on. Avoid touching the mask once you have put it on. If the mask needs to be adjusted, hands should be cleaned before and after adjusting the mask. Never pull the mask down below the nose, mouth, or chin. Never dangle the mask from one ear or both ears.

To remove the mask safely, remove it from behind using the strings or elastic ear loops. Do not touch the front of the mask. Discard the mask immediately, ideally in a no-touch receptacle. Perform hand hygiene by handwashing with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Visit <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/prepareandprevent/index.html> for the latest guidance on the use and care of masks.

Consideration can be given to teachers and staff to wear face shields or coverings and eye protection, in addition to a mask (not in place of a mask).

Visit the following Public Health Agency of Canada page to access a poster and guidelines for how to safely use a non-medical mask or face covering: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/covid-19-safely-use-non-medical-mask-face-covering.html>.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Increased frequency of cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing - particularly on high-touch surfaces and in common/shared areas - will be required. Schools must:

- Disinfect commonly touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, electronic devices, chairs, desks, art supplies, toys, games, gym equipment, tools and equipment) frequently - at least twice daily, or more often as needed.
- Increase monitoring of hand-cleaning supplies to ensure an ample supply at all sinks in washroom and kitchen areas.
- Ensure washrooms and lunchrooms are cleaned and disinfected frequently (at least twice daily, and more often as needed) and stagger use.
- Turn off water fountains that are not touchless or cannot be cleaned between users.
- Ensure there is enhanced cleaning of bus seats and other high-touch surfaces (e.g., windows and railings) before each new group of students attends the bus.

Health Canada has posted a list of disinfectants shown to be effective against COVID-19 at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.

School administrators are encouraged to review existing activities and practices within their settings to help determine where enhancements or increased cleaning frequencies may be beneficial. This includes limiting the use of high-touch objects and surfaces by multiple individuals (e.g., providing children with their own containers of arts and crafts materials that are not shared with others).

Waste should be disposed of regularly. Hand hygiene should be performed after waste removal. No-touch waste receptacles are preferred.

Health Concerns and How to Address Them

What Happens if a Child Exhibits Symptoms?

If a child develops symptoms while at school, the child should be isolated in a separate room. If a separate room is not immediately available, the child needs to be kept at least two metres or six feet away from other children and staff. A medical mask will be provided to be worn by the sick student (over two years of age only), unless there are safety issues that prevent the student from wearing a mask.

The parent should be notified to come and pick up the child immediately. Parents or caregivers must pick up their child as soon as possible if they are notified their child is ill.

Ask the parent or guardian to contact Health Links – Info Santé (204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257) or the child's health care provider for direction, if required.

If the child is young and requires close contact and care while isolated, caregivers can continue to care for the child until the parent is able to pick up the child. Caregivers should be mindful of hand hygiene and avoid contact with the respiratory secretions of the child. A medical mask should be worn by the staff person caring for the child.

If a parent/caregiver is unreachable to pick up a sick child, school staff should keep the child isolated in a separate room until the parent or caregiver arrives. If the medical condition requires urgent assessment, or if the parent cannot be located, they should follow standard procedures. Anyone in close contact with the child while waiting should wear personal protective equipment, including a medical mask. Once the student is picked up, the staff member should practise diligent hand hygiene.

Additional environmental cleaning will be required. Focus should be on high-touch areas and areas where the child spent time. All items (e.g., bedding and toys) used by the child while isolated should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as the child has been picked up.

A sick child can return to the school once it has been determined that it is safe to do so by their health care provider or public health. If that child has a positive test, further direction will be provided by public health. Public health typically follows up with contacts of cases within 24 to 48 hours of receipt of the laboratory report.

What Happens if a Staff Member Exhibits Symptoms?

If a staff member or volunteer in a school becomes symptomatic, they should immediately isolate themselves from other staff and children, notify their supervisor, and go home to isolate. They should then contact Health Links – Info Santé (204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257) or their health care provider for direction. Additional environmental cleaning should occur. Focus should be on high-touch areas and areas where the staff or volunteer spent time.

Staff members who are away sick or who are self-isolating must follow the school's human resources policy and collective agreement provisions. Medical notes are not required for staff who have COVID-19 or flu-related symptoms, or for those who are caring for individuals in this situation.

A sick staff member can return to work once it has been determined that it is safe to do so by their health care provider or public health. If that staff member has a positive test, further direction will be provided by public health.

Personal Risk Factors

Arrangements will be needed for students, teachers, administrators and school staff who may be at higher risk of COVID-19 due to underlying health conditions or other risk factors.

Division-level remote learning will be in place for students who are medically advised not to return to in-class learning due to COVID-related risk factors. These situations should be rare and limited to children with compromised immune systems or other medical conditions that increase their risk. Parents and caregivers must consult with physicians on the need for an accommodation.

Outbreak Management

In the event of the confirmation of a case of COVID-19 connected with a school, public health will lead the response and ensure appropriate supports are in place to coordinate the response. Contact tracing involves identifying the contacts of a positive case and contacting those individuals who may have been exposed. Public health may:

- request records that identify cohorts/groups of staff, students, volunteers and visitors in the school for a specified timeframe
- contact students, staff and families if they have been in close contact with a confirmed or probable case, and confirm whether they need to self-isolate or self-monitor, and when they can return to school
- recommend testing following established guidelines to staff, students, volunteers and visitors who may have been exposed to a positive case
- assess the need for the school to be closed for a period of time

Schools will clean and disinfect areas where exposures took place. These areas will not be used until they are determined to be safe. School closure would be a last resort and only upon evidence of transmission among multiple cohorts.

Form letters and standard messages for school administrators will be available to share with parents, staff and students when a case is confirmed in a school. If there is an outbreak at a school, this will be announced through Manitoba media bulletins and public health will provide instructions to those who have been in close contact.

It will be important for schools to work closely with their local public health team, and they should reach out if a situation arises where they require clarification or information. Manitoba Education and Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living (MHSAL) will be working with local public health teams and regional health authorities to ensure that they have the most up-to-date information. A dedicated Manitoba Education email address will be monitored so school administrators have timely access to information and support: educovid19@gov.mb.ca.

School Operations during COVID-19

Reassurance and Communication

Provide reassurance to children and youth about their personal safety and health. Telling children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting. Reassure them about their safety, and explain that there are many things they can do to stay healthy, including:

- **Hand hygiene:** Perform hand hygiene often, with soap and warm water, for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer—especially after coughing, blowing noses, sneezing, and when handling food.
- **Cough and sneeze etiquette:** Cough and sneeze into their arm or a tissue. If using a tissue, immediately dispose of it and perform hand hygiene afterwards.
- **Stay home when sick:** Children should tell staff if they are not feeling well and make a plan together to stay home from school or other activities.
- **Keep clean:** Do not touch your face—particularly your eyes, nose and mouth.
- **Stay healthy:** Stay healthy by eating healthy foods, keeping physically active and getting enough sleep and fresh air.

Print the Healthy Practices Poster Series (in particular, the hand hygiene and sneezing posters) and place them around the school. School-aged children can be encouraged to create their own. Several printable resources, including posters and factsheets, are available online at the following websites:

- <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/resources/index.html>
- <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/providers/posters/>

Children want to be heard. They do not need detailed information about events, but they do need to talk about their feelings. Let them know they can ask questions. Answer questions honestly, but make sure that the information is suitable for their age level. If answers are not known, it is okay to say so and to look for resources together that can answer their questions.

Remember that children are often listening when others are talking about COVID-19. Staff should consider this and minimize discussions of COVID-19 that are not related to the specific setting. Staff should be mindful of how children share information in less supervised settings (e.g., during outdoor play, before and after school, during lunch and snack times). In these settings, children can become misinformed. It is important for staff to correct this misinformation as they become aware of it. More information on talking to children about COVID-19 is available in the Additional Information and Resources section at the end of this document.

At this time, parents are increasingly focused on the safety and well-being of their children while they are in other settings. They expect clear communication from staff when they have questions about their child and about how the school is implementing public health guidance. Parents have more access to misinformation, which makes it important for staff to remind parents to use official sources for the most up-to-date and accurate information. This can be found at www.gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus/index.html.

Staff can reassure parents that Manitoba's schools are safe for children when they are consistently following preventative practices, including environmental cleaning, frequent hand hygiene and routine screening.

Recess/Lunch Breaks

Public health advises that playgrounds and play structures are low risk for transmission. There are no specific requirements for cleaning play structures. Schools must also:

- Schedule outdoor play to maintain cohorts of children and staff.
- Maintain separate containers of equipment for each class or cohort, and clean between recess periods.
- Mark zones, manage group sizes, and avoid contact among groups.
- Ensure handwashing or hand hygiene is performed before and after recess.
- Ensure crossing guards receive additional information about how to physically distance while performing their duties

Non-medical masks can be removed during outdoor play to provide a mask-free break.

Students must bring their own lunches, or provided lunches must be individually wrapped in disposable containers. If weather permits, lunch breaks may be held outside. Schools can continue to offer cafeteria services, breakfast and lunch programs with necessary adjustments to ensure health guidelines are in place. No family-style, buffet, or potluck meal service is permitted at this time.

Food Handling

The best practice is that parents and guardians provide their own food for their child. If this is not possible, the following guidance applies:

- Staff should serve all food items.
- Utensils (not fingers) should be used by staff to serve food.
- Remove shared food containers from eating areas (e.g., snack bowls, pitchers of water or milk, salt and pepper shakers).
- If using single service packets of condiments, provide the packet directly to each child, rather than self-serving from a bulk container.
- For snack programs, dispense snacks directly to children and use prepackaged snacks only.
- Close kitchen and nourishment areas that could be accessed by children or visitors.
- Implement other measures as necessary or appropriate, or if directed by local public health.
- Ensure that food handling staff practise meticulous hand hygiene.
- With the exception of culinary programs that are supervised by qualified staff and follow industry standards, cease activities involving student participation in food preparation.

No-Sharing Policies

It is important to reinforce in children the policies of no food sharing and no water-bottle sharing. Generally, these policies are intended to reduce potential exposures to allergens, but the practice of not sharing food or water bottles in schools also helps reduce virus transmission among staff and children. Students are encouraged to keep personal belongings with them. Locker use should be limited or discontinued to avoid congregation in hallways.

Toys

As per standard procedures, it is recommended that schools have toys that are easily cleaned and disinfected. It may be prudent to increase the frequency of the cleaning schedule for these items, especially when illness is circulating in the setting or the local community, or if symptomatic staff and children have been touching the toys.

Plush toys should be avoided. Children's personal toys (i.e., for security or comfort) are not to be shared with other children and should be stored in a way that ensures this.

In general, sensory play must not be used at this time. Children should not use or handle modelling clay, or indoor sand and sensory tables, as these items cannot be easily disinfected. An exception can be made for children with additional support needs where the use of these items is an important part of their individual plan. These items should then be used under staff supervision and exclusively by the individual child.

Physical Education and Sports

Activities that involve movement should be held outside, including those for physical health and education. Indoor or outdoor non-contact sports (e.g., tennis and soccer) are permitted, as long as physical distancing can be maintained during the play, except for brief exchanges of close contact. Choose outdoor settings as much as possible, as they are a lower risk for transmission of COVID-19. A more detailed document has been developed to provide guidance on how sports and other activities could be modified/adapted to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. It is available at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/sports-guidelines.html>.

Field Trips

Field trips or outings are permitted. However, the participation of children must be voluntary and accompanied by appropriate parental permission. Enhanced planning for field trips will be necessary to ensure the health guidelines are met. When planning outings or field trips, consider the following:

- Outdoor settings are lower risk for transmission of COVID-19.
- Avoid crowded venues where physical distancing of two metres (six feet) cannot be maintained.
- Ensure there is access to handwashing and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizer during the outing. Handwashing will be required if the activity involves getting hands soiled.
- For group transportation, physical distancing and/or cohorts need to be maintained. Please refer to [transportation guidelines](#) for details.
- Avoid using public water fountains. Children should bring their own prefilled water bottle to these activities.

Activities with Animals/Pets

Animals and pets are permitted. Children and staff who handle animals should perform proper hand hygiene before and after handling animals (see Hygiene Practices section above). Ensure animal handlers who are visiting the school are screened, following the processes for visitors, and ensure physical distancing is possible between the animal handler and the child. It is required that a non-medical mask be worn by the visitor as an additional precaution.

Early Learning and Child Care

Manitoba Education and Manitoba Families are working together with school divisions and the child care sector to ensure that families can continue accessing child care within schools. Schools will work cooperatively with school-based child care centres to ensure that they can continue to operate. This includes protection of designated child care centre space for child care centres in schools, and an approach to supporting shared spaces, including cleaning protocols.

For information on child care services during the pandemic, please visit <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/infomanitobans/childcare.html>.

Education Policy and Governance

Manitoba Education will continue to work with educational partners to ensure school boards and their administrators are able to govern and operate as the pandemic situation evolves. This may include periods of flexibility in the application of specific legislative and policy requirements and timelines, in line with public health guidance. The department will also ensure clear and timely communication of any changes with education stakeholders, parents, students and the public. The following is of special note:

- Board meetings are able to convene via online or remote methods with provisions for public participation, and in line with prevailing regulated requirements.
- Manitoba Education will continue to assess where funding and other reporting requirements need to be adapted to reflect boards' and public health circumstances.
- Manitoba Education will monitor and work with school divisions and funded independent schools to avoid any impacts or constraints in reporting enrolment.

Student Achievement and Learning

Communication

The success of the school re-opening plan and student achievement will depend in part on parents, caregivers and students being informed about new protocols. This communication will be needed throughout the year. Communication strategies will include:

- fact sheets explaining new protocols and links to helpful information, as well as detailed instructions regarding screening and pick-up and drop-off procedures and protocols if a child or staff person becomes ill
- alternative delivery models for activities such as parent-teacher conferences and school assemblies
- information for students related to school hours, physical distancing, hand hygiene, remote learning and resources to support learning and well-being at home

Schools should engage their local parent councils. School administrators are also encouraged to work with local associations and employee representatives, including Workplace Safety and Health committees. Local COVID-19 response planning teams should be established to coordinate planning.

Attendance

All students are expected to participate fully, even when remote learning is required. Students will be assessed on their work, reflective of their performance and learning. Schools are critical to the mental health and well-being of children. Planning should focus on returning as many students to in-class learning as possible, while following public health measures.

Because students and staff must stay home when sick, schools and school divisions must plan for absenteeism. Classroom teachers will support the development and provision of at-home learning packages for students who are isolating or quarantined. Strategies for the recruitment and retention of substitute teachers and other staff members will also be required.

Due to the nature of the contact among teachers, staff and students, and the ability to maintain physical distancing, substitute teachers, clinicians and other staff can work across multiple schools. Restrictions may be put in place if the risk level increases.

Blended Learning

Teacher-directed remote learning will be an essential component of K to 12 education throughout the pandemic. When remote learning is needed, students may work independently on their own, as well as work with a teacher in real time. Blended in-class and remote learning plans may need to be implemented on short notice and may be in response to isolation due to illness from exposures. Mechanisms to maintain ongoing contact with students who are participating in remote learning are critical to keeping students engaged. School divisions and schools will ensure that all students who are participating in remote learning have access to technology. Manitoba Education will continue to work with school divisions and stakeholders to ensure the availability of devices and to identify options for students and staff where Internet availability is limited.

Recovery Learning

Students will need an opportunity to adjust to new school routines and expectations. Some students had lower participation in remote learning than others, and educators will need to be creative to address the achievement and learning gaps that may exist. Mental health and well-being is critical to returning to in-class learning plans. Regular check-ins and assessment will play an important role in supporting students' well-being and in helping students learn to the greatest extent possible.

Teaching Focus and Timetabling

Schools are to maintain instruction of mandated curricula of core subject areas. Unilateral program cuts will not be supported and school divisions must discuss these types of changes with Manitoba Education. Electives may be limited to accommodate scheduling if this does not affect educational requirements. Consideration may be given to offering some electives remotely or via distance for high school students. If remote learning is required to meet public health measures, a minimum of two of six days in a cycle is required for high school students. Web cameras can be issued, with an appropriate privacy impact assessment, to allow students to follow along with their class from home for real-time learning.

To the greatest extent possible, schools and school divisions should schedule high school classes to avoid spares on days they are at school in the 2020/2021 school year. Schools must implement measures to avoid congestion indoors, including asking students to go home or outdoors, as well as offering supervision in a common area, such as a gym or library, to ensure physical distancing is being maintained.

Creative uses of community spaces and timetabling is permitted, including reassigning staff and identifying alternate locations. Use as many outdoor activities as possible. School administrators will need to assess the impact and ensure any changes to school routines and assignments are communicated broadly.

Assessment

Student assessment and evaluation will proceed. Reporting for the Provincial Grade 3/4 and Middle Years assessments for the 2020/2021 school year is suspended to ensure the focus is placed on supporting students' return to in-class learning and recovery learning needs. Grade 12 provincial tests are scheduled to proceed as normal. Schools will be notified if the public health situation warrants a change to the provincial tests. In the event of cancellation, other forms of assessment will be used to determine students' marks.

Report cards will be provided to all students, including in situations where remote learning is required.

Supports for Students with Special Needs

There are unique challenges experienced by students with special learning needs during this time and additional supports may be required. This includes:

- considering changes in the school environment or remote learning needs when reviewing and updating Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- creating congregated classrooms as a temporary COVID-19 response measure for students' special learning needs in order to offer regular, everyday timetabling
- considering additional planning for students with special learning needs to support a smoother transition to school
- safely supporting the return of medically fragile students by consulting with local public health authorities on any new risk factors for the student, implementing staff training, and potentially continuing remote learning where return is not possible
- accommodating the needs of students who require significant personal support, including considering options for personal protective equipment for both staff and students (please refer to https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/guides_support_students.pdf)
- considering alternate attendance options for students, depending on their needs

Manitoba Education continues to work with Manitoba Families and education stakeholders to further develop guidance and support for students with special needs and students at risk. For more information, please visit <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/support/rssn.html>.

Specialty Programming

Technical-vocational education programming can continue, provided public health measures such as daily symptom monitoring, physical distancing, and/or cohorts are maintained. When planning for technical-vocational, industrial arts, human ecology and applied commerce education programs, the Manitoba COVID-19 support documents *Workplace Guidance for Business Owners and Guidance for Industry Sectors* may provide useful sector-specific information. See:

<https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/guidance.html>

<https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/industry-sectors.html>.

For extracurricular activities such as choral and music, schools will need to carefully assess their ability to continue. Musical activities involving singing or wind and brass instruments may increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Choir practices and band practices pose a higher level of risk, and special consideration should be given to how they are held, the room ventilation, and the distance between performers. Instruments should not be shared between students.

As there are no specific interventions that eliminate the risk from these group activities at this time, it is difficult to provide specific guidance for choral or for wind instruments. Schools may consider cancelling these activities for the upcoming year or initially for the fall term, as further evidence on their risk becomes available. Schools that proceed must ensure that they take additional precautions and follow Manitoba's Restoring Safe Services: Guidelines for Vocalists and Instrumentalists at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/music-guidelines.html>.

Professional Development Priorities

There is recognition of the value and importance of professional learning as part of the pandemic response planning. A strong focus should be placed on recovery learning, remote learning, mental health and well-being. Schools and school divisions will need to align their professional learning and continuous improvement planning with these themes. School divisions will need to follow public health guidance and travel restrictions when developing their professional learning plans.

Mental Health and Well-Being

Student and staff mental health and well-being must be core elements of the re-opening planning. It is foundational in ensuring a return to a welcoming environment that supports learning. Each school division and independent school is to prepare a strategy that responds to their local community needs and include it as part of their 2020/2021 plan.

Supports for student and staff mental health and well-being may include the following components:

- professional learning for system leaders, educators and mental health professionals to support the approach to school re-entry, as well as throughout the school year
- improved communication about, and awareness of, mental health resources that are available for educators (such as *AbilitiCBT* at <https://myicbt.com/home> and the Educator Assistance Program at <https://www.mbteach.org/mtscms/2016/05/24/educator-assistance-program/>) and for students (such as Kids Help Phone at <https://kidshelpphone.ca/> or Stress Hacks at <https://stresshacks.ca/>)
- a person-centred, trauma-informed approach for mental health supports that will capture all students and target intensive help to those who have been most affected by the COVID-19 outbreak
- collaboration with child and youth mental health agencies to support stronger connections and make the best use of mental health resources and supports across the integrated system of care

Manitoba Education will also support professional learning with a strong focus on building students' social-emotional learning skills, so they can increase resilience, manage their stress, and develop positive relationships.

Additional Information and Resources

More information on Manitoba Education's COVID-19 response, including resources, planning documents, and frequently asked questions, can be found at *Latest COVID-19 Education News* at <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html>.

My Learning at Home, a resource to assist families to support their children in remote learning from home, can be found at <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/mylearning/learningathome/index.html>.

Current information about COVID-19 in Manitoba can be found at <http://www.manitoba.ca/covid19/>.

Public Health Resources

- As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve in Manitoba, please check the provincial website at www.manitoba.ca/covid19 for the most up-to-date information.
- All screening that identifies suspected cases of COVID-19 is to be referred to Health Links – Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-7257.
- A detailed online self-screening tool for individuals to use is available at <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>.

Communication Resources

- Up-to-date public health information is available at <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/updates/resources.html>.
- An up-to-date list of symptoms is available at <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/updates/about.html>.
- The following website has posters that can be printed and used: <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/providers/posters/>.
- A printable workplace screening poster is available at www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/coronavirus/COVID-19-poster-1.pdf.

Resources on Talking to Children about COVID-19

- *Resources for Supporting Children's Emotional Well-being during the COVID-19 Pandemic*
This site provides guidance, recommendations, and resources from child trauma experts at Child Trends and the Child Trauma Training Center at the University of Massachusetts. https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-for-supporting-childrens-emotional-well-being-during-the-covid-19-pandemic?utm_source=mailchimp&utm_campaign=030096d2e1f0&utm_medium=page
- *How Teachers Can Talk to Children about Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)*
This UNICEF site provides tips for having age-appropriate discussions to reassure and protect children. <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-teachers-can-talk-children-about-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>.

- *Seven Simple Tips on How to Talk to Kids About the Coronavirus*
As the world's leading expert on childhood, Save the Children has provided parents, schools, and communities with these tools and tips about COVID-19 and kids.
https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/emergency-response/coronavirus-outbreak/coronavirus-outbreak-how-to-explain-children?utm_source=mailchimp&utm_campaign=030096d2e1f0&utm_medium=page

Transportation Resources

- Specific guidelines for transportation to schools are available at
<https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/reopening/transportation.html>.

Technical-Vocational Education

- When planning for technical-vocational, industrial arts, human ecology and applied commerce education programs, the Manitoba COVID-19 support documents Workplace Guidance for Business Owners and Guidance for Industry Sectors may provide useful sector-specific information. See <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/guidance.html> and <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/industry-sectors.html> for specific information.

Protective Personal Equipment Resources

- Visit <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/prepareandprevent/index.html> for the latest guidance on use and care of masks.
- Visit the following Public Health Agency of Canada page to access a poster as well as guidelines detailing how to safely use a non-medical mask or face covering:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/covid-19-safely-use-non-medical-mask-face-covering.html>.

Cleaning Resources

- Health Canada has the following list of disinfectants that have been shown to be effective against COVID-19: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.

NOTE: The public health information provided in this document is subject to change as the science and information regarding COVID-19 continue to evolve. Please visit Latest COVID-19 Education News regularly at <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html> for the most up-to-date information.