Return to Campus Public Health Guidance

UPDATED: December 22, 2021

Key Messages

- This document outlines the prevention measures recommended by public health for post-secondary institutions in B.C. to reduce the risk of communicable diseases, including COVID-19, on campus.
- Educational settings are low-risk settings for COVID-19 transmission, particularly in the context of a highly immunized population.
- Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 on campus. Everyone eligible is strongly encouraged to be fully vaccinated (i.e., receive two doses) against COVID-19.

Introduction

This document outlines the prevention measures recommended by public health for post-secondary institutions in B.C. to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It aligns with, and is complementary to, the COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Guidelines.

Public health experts in B.C. support the full return to on-campus instruction on September 7th, 2021 for post-secondary institutions, with the effective evidence-informed prevention measures detailed within this guidance document in place.

In B.C., most transmission of COVID-19 occurs in households or at informal social gatherings. In educational and other comparable settings, including those with teaching, learning, research, and student development activities, COVID-19 transmission is uncommon. Young people have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Enabling them to return to closer-to-normal learning, recreational, and social activities is needed for pandemic recovery. While COVID-19 will continue to circulate for many years, in an immunized population like B.C., COVID-19 prevention needs to be balanced with recovery efforts.

The prevention measures detailed in this document have been very effective at preventing COVID-19 in a wide variety of settings across B.C. and will support a successful and safe return to campus. Prior to implementing measures in addition to those outlined below, consult with your local Medical Health Officer to ensure benefit.

Post-secondary institutions are encouraged to transition to these recommended prevention measures over a period of time, recognizing this as an evolving situation with multiple steps necessary to support implementation. Public Health remains committed to supporting the post-secondary sector, including faculty, staff, and students to return to the educational and research activities that are critical to the community and to society.
Vaccination

Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 on campus. Two doses provide effective protection against infection and serious illness from COVID-19, including variants of concern. Vaccines are available to all faculty, students, and staff, including international students and their families.

Post-secondary institutions can work with public health to ensure vaccination opportunities are accessible in the first weeks of the return to campus, as well as promote information on how to get vaccinated. The BC Centre for Disease Control has specific information on getting vaccinated for students arriving in B.C. from within and outside of Canada.

People vaccinated outside of B.C. can upload their COVID-19 vaccination records to www.immunizationrecord.gov.bc.ca. This requires a B.C. Personal Health Number, which can be obtained by contacting Service BC at 1-833-838-2323. Service BC is available seven days a week, 7am to 7pm.

Some experiential learning placements (including practicum and co-op placements) may require students to be vaccinated in line with practices for other employees. This includes health sciences students working in certain health care settings by Order of the Provincial Health Officer.

Testing and Contact Tracing

**COVID-19 Testing:** Testing is available to any student, faculty or staff in BC. Share guidance on when to get tested with the campus community. Testing locations are available on Regional Health Authority websites. Routine asymptomatic testing of unimmunized individuals has been proposed to further reduce the likelihood of transmission on campus. The benefit of this intervention diminishes as immunization rate increases. Based on a review of literature and local modeling analysis, the benefit of routine asymptomatic screening of unimmunized students and staff is limited when immunization coverage is 80% and vanishingly small at 90%. If you are considering using point-of-care tests for asymptomatic screening of unvaccinated students, faculty and staff, consult your local Medical Health Officer prior to implementation to ensure appropriate guidelines are followed.

**Contact Tracing:** Public health follows up on every person who tests positive for COVID-19. This process is called contact tracing. Contact tracing helps to identify and manage close contacts, who may be at increased risk for COVID-19.

Public health will work with institutions to manage cases and clusters of COVID-19, as required. Work with public health to determine what protocols should be in place to manage COVID-19 cases on campus. This may include providing the name and contact information of identified students, faculty and staff upon request of public health.

As part of contact tracing, close contacts are notified by public health and informed of what subsequent actions they should take (e.g., monitor for symptoms, self-isolate, seek testing, etc.) as they may be at increased risk for COVID-19. Public health will also facilitate general notifications more broadly within the campus community or post the information to Regional Health Authority websites when necessary for contact tracing or outbreak management, in line
with notification practices for other community and workplace settings. General notifications are typically provided to those who are at greater risk for communicable disease and need to take subsequent actions beyond continuing to follow general public health recommendations.

**Administrator Role:** Post-secondary Institutions are not responsible for contact tracing, and should not provide notifications to faculty, staff or students about potential or confirmed communicable diseases cases (including COVID-19) unless requested to do so by the local Medical Health Officer.

Should faculty, staff or students disclose that they have tested positive for COVID-19 or bring forward concerns related to unconfirmed cases on campus, administrators may consider the following key messages if they determine the need to address their campus community:

- We continue to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of our students, faculty and staff. Effective prevention measures are in place across campus to prevent COVID-19 from spreading.
- Educational settings are low-risk settings for COVID-19 transmission, particularly in the context of a highly immunized population.
- Public health authorities are responsible for determining notification processes and requirements for confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- In most situations, local public health will directly notify close contacts who may be at increased risk. See BCCDC for more information on close contacts.
- Since COVID-19 transmission is uncommon in educational settings, in most cases, public health notifications to the campus community will not be required.
- Please do not notify faculty, staff or students about potential or confirmed communicable disease cases (including COVID-19) unless requested to do so by the local Medical Health Officer.
- In the interim, continue to do your daily health checks and follow all of the prevention measures in the communicable disease prevention plan.
- Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**Provincial Health Officer Orders**

Post-secondary institutions must follow applicable Provincial Health Officer Orders. Full details on Orders are available from the Provincial Health Officer. Current Orders applicable to post-secondary institutions include:

**Post-secondary Institution Housing COVID-19 Preventive Measures:** Those living in on-campus housing must provide proof of vaccination, indicating they have received all recommended doses or combination of World Health Organization approved vaccines at least seven days previously, to their post-secondary institution by September 23, 2021. After this date, those who are unvaccinated are required to wear a face covering (mask) in any area of housing other than their room.

**Gatherings & Events Order:** Certain types of gatherings and events in B.C., including those on post-secondary campuses are restricted. This includes non-educational (i.e., non-essential or discretionary) activities, including graduation ceremonies, parties, recitals, and concerts. Current size limits are 50 people or 50% of a venue’s capacity indoors.
(whichever is greater) or 5,000 people or 50% of a venue’s capacity outdoors (whichever is greater). For example, if an indoor venue has a normal seated capacity of 600 people, 300 people can attend.

**Gathering & Events (Section D) /Food and Liquor Serving Premises (Section B) Orders - Proof of Vaccination:** Everyone on campus aged 12 and older (born in 2009 or earlier) needs to provide [proof of vaccination](#) via the BC Vaccine Card to access some [non-essential or discretionary](#) services, businesses, and events on campus as of September 13, 2021. Examples of non-essential or discretionary services include, but are not limited to:

- Indoor ticketed concerts, theatre, dance, symphony and sporting events (with more than 50 participants)
- Indoor and outdoor dining at restaurants, pubs and bars (on-campus cafeterias are excluded)
- Indoor adult sports activities and group exercise
- Indoor organized gatherings like conferences, conventions and workshops (with more than 50 participants)
- Indoor organized group recreational classes and activities like pottery and art (with more than 50 participants)

Both Orders are currently in place until January 31, 2022 and are subject to extension.

**Face Coverings (COVID-19) Order – Indoor Public Spaces:** [Masks must be worn in all indoor public spaces](#) in B.C., including post-secondary spaces by anyone aged 12 and older, including students, faculty, staff and visitors. This includes, but is not limited to:

- in all public indoor public spaces of post secondary institutions
  - This includes lecture theatres, classrooms, teaching laboratories, and other indoor instructional settings
  - Instructors and other presenters do not need to wear a mask when behind a barrier or two metres away from students while teaching in indoor public spaces
- in common areas of buildings including in on-campus housing and office buildings (e.g., lobbies, hallways, bathrooms)
- in common areas of sport and fitness centres when not engaged in physical activity
- in coffee shops and restaurants, pubs and bars when not seated at a table

Masks are not required for workspaces such as office areas, research labs or shared offices that do not serve the public, or for meetings and seminars in small meeting rooms. Masks are also not required if a person is behind a barrier that separates them from other people, like a divider, cubicle, or in a room by themselves. Exemptions, including for those unable to wear a face covering, are detailed in the [Order](#).

**Regional Recommendations & Orders:** Medical Health Officers can place local public health Orders or recommendations for additional prevention measures beyond this guidance for post-secondary institutions within their regional health authority. These are placed at their own discretion, based on their authority under provincial legislation. These may be put in place during times of increased community transmission of COVID-19, and within communities with low vaccination uptake. They are based on local epidemiology and are proportional to risk.
Environmental Measures

Ventilation: Continue to ensure that all mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are designed, operated and maintained in accordance with WorkSafe BC requirements and ASHRAE Standards for indoor air quality, and that they are working properly. Open windows when the weather permits if it doesn’t impact the functioning of the ventilation systems.

Cleaning & Disinfection: Clean and disinfect educational spaces, public spaces and high touch areas daily. Environmental cleaning is not required between classes.

Administrative Measures

- Physical distancing (consistently maintaining 2 metres between people) is no longer recommended in indoor public spaces by public health or required by WorkSafe BC. People on campus can be encouraged to spread out within available space and to consider and respect others’ personal space (the distance from which a person feels comfortable being next to another person).
- Limiting the number of people within indoor public spaces is no longer recommended by public health or required by WorkSafe BC. People can be encouraged to spread out within the available space and normal room occupancy limits should not be exceeded (where applicable).
- Post-secondary institutions are not required to manage the flow of pedestrian traffic within buildings or confined areas, or post occupancy limits for spaces such as elevators or washrooms.

Personal Measures

Stay Home When Sick: Ensure students, faculty and staff are aware they should not participate in any activities (educational or otherwise) if they are sick.

Get Tested When Recommended: Encourage students faculty and staff to use the BC Self-Assessment Tool app, the BCCDC When to Get Tested Resource, or call 8-1-1 to determine if they should get tested for COVID-19 if they’re sick.

Institutions should identify and make available safe and appropriate housing for students living on campus who are required to self-isolate or quarantine, if recommended by public health.

Hand Hygiene: Enable regular opportunities for hand hygiene, including placing hand sanitizer stations at the entrances/exits to public indoor spaces.