Public health principles for school staff

The risk of transmission of COVID-19 in schools is low, so staff and children can return to schools based on BC’s Education Restart Plan. There are now fewer cases across BC and public health is actively identifying and isolating all new cases and their contacts.

Below are four key public health principles to keep the risk of COVID-19 low in schools. These do not replace other guidelines. Check WorkSafeBC, the Ministry of Education, local school districts, the FAQ resource for school staff and the BCCDC website for more details.

How can schools and staff prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Stay home if you are sick

*Why?* Staying away from others if you are sick is one of the best ways to protect others from COVID-19.

*How?* All students and staff should stay home and self-isolate if they:
- Have any symptoms consistent with COVID-19, OR
- Travelled outside Canada in the last 14 days, OR
- Had close contact with a confirmed case or outbreak of COVID-19 and have been directed to self-isolate by public health.

Use the self-assessment tool at bc.thrive.health or call 8-1-1 to assess symptoms and determine if testing is needed.

Staff should assess themselves daily for symptoms. Encourage parents and caregivers to also assess their children daily for symptoms.

Ensure frequently touched surfaces are cleaned often

*Why?* If you touch your eyes, nose or mouth after touching a surface with COVID-19 virus on it, you can get sick. Keeping surfaces clean helps prevent the spread of COVID-19.

*How?* Cleaning involves two phases. First, remove visible dirt from common surfaces with soap and water. Second, use household disinfectants or the usual commercially available cleaning products in schools to kill viral or bacterial particles on a surface.
Encourage minimizing physical contact

**Why?** When you cough or sneeze, liquid droplets spread 1-2 metres away from you. You can prevent COVID-19 by keeping 2 metres apart from others while also practicing respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene.

**How?** Staying 2 metres apart is not always feasible and is not expected at all times in schools. Encourage children to avoid physical contact. This is more important than keeping 2 metres apart. Adults should still keep 2 metres apart from each other and students, while also minimizing physical contact as much as possible.

Practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

**Why?** Proper hand hygiene destroys the virus on your hands. Respiratory etiquette prevents the spread of droplets.

**How?** Thoroughly washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Dry your hands with paper towels.

If sinks are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. If hands are visibly dirty, wipe your hands before using hand sanitizer.

Staff and students should cough or sneeze into their elbow, sleeve or a tissue. They should avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.

Wearing a mask, especially for children, is not recommended to prevent COVID-19. Wearing a mask is a personal choice and should be permitted.

Learn more at bccdc.ca/covid19