



Coronavirus COVID-19

BC Centre for Disease Control | BC Ministry of Health



Health-Care Provider Summary: Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools

This guidance is intended for pediatricians, primary care providers and other health-care professionals working with school-aged children and youth and their parents/caregivers. It is based on known evidence as of May 3, 2021.

Summary

- The [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) outlines the health and safety measures to be implemented in K-12 schools to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. It was last updated in February 2021.
- Schools are low-risk settings for COVID-19 transmission. When transmission does occur, it usually results in only one or two additional cases.
- There is widespread support amongst pediatricians to have children attend in-person learning, including most children with medical complexity and/or immune compromise, when safety measures are in place.

NEW: Key Changes in the February 2021 Update

Daily Health Check	Staff and students need to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms prior to attending school. The self-screen has been aligned to the provincial testing criteria . Specific requirements are detailed here .
Focus on staff interactions	When school-based transmission occurred, it was commonly staff-to-staff transmission. The guidance document was updated to support schools to focus on ensuring health and safety measures are in place and practiced in staff-only spaces and for staff-to-staff interactions.
Increased use of non-medical masks (masks)	Masks provide some protection to the wearer and to those around them. Increasing mask use has been recommended across community and workplace settings. Staff in all K-12 schools and students in grades 4-12 wear masks indoors and on buses. Kindergarten to grade 3 students' mask use is based on their personal or family/caregiver's choice. Specific requirements are detailed here .
Reinforcement of existing practices	When school-based transmission occurred, a common contributing factor was the inconsistent implementation of health and safety measures. All K-12 schools were required to complete a health and safety checklist in February 2021 to identify if and where changes were needed to ensure health and safety measures were consistently implemented.



Ministry of Health



BC Centre for Disease Control

If you have fever, a new cough, or are having difficulty breathing, call 8-1-1.



COVID-19 and B.C. Schools: What We Know So Far

[Reviews of school-related cases](#) (slides 19 and on) in Fraser Health (FH) and Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) found the following:

- Most cases of COVID-19 among students and staff are acquired outside of school in their household or community.
 - In VCH from Sept. 8 – Dec. 18, 2020, there were 55 cases likely acquired in school out of 699 cases among students and staff (~8% of cases) and out of 8,746 cases reported in the region (~0.6% of all cases).
 - In FH from Jan. 1 – Mar. 7, 2021, there were 267 cases likely acquired in school out of 2,049 cases among students and staff (~13% of cases) and out of 16,053 cases reported in the region (~1.6% of all cases).
- School transmission does not appear to be a major driver of community transmission. School closures during winter and spring holidays did not appear to lead to reductions in overall cases among students and staff.
- In-school transmission was limited. When it did occur, there were usually only an additional one or two cases.

From provincial data (September 7, 2020 to April 9, 2021), we know COVID-19 has a relatively low infection rate among school-aged children (ages 5-18) in B.C., although this increases as they get older:

Age Group	Number of Cases	Percentage of Cases	Percent of Population
0 – 4 Years	2,113	2.07	4.41
5 – 12 Years	5,468	5.37	7.65
13 – 18 Years	6,350	6.23	6.16
19+ Years	87,941	86.32	81.79

- Serious COVID-19 outcomes are less common in school-aged children: Less than 1 in 200 school-aged children with COVID-19 is hospitalized. This is considerably lower than adults 19+ (1 in 20). Slides detailing this information are available [here](#).

Areas of Interest

Variants of concern (VoCs)	The impact of VoCs on in-school transmission is unclear. Because they are spread by the same mechanisms as the original COVID-19 virus, there have not been VoC-related changes recommended for school health and safety plans. School medical health officers have not noted differences in school-based transmission patterns based on case reviews and data analysis to date.
School closures	Accumulated evidence suggests that school closures are not supported as a public health measure to control transmission in the community, due to their expected limited impact on overall transmission. This is because the majority of transmissions in B.C. occur in the household or community. School closures also result in societal harms, particularly for children and families who already experience inequities. These are detailed here .
Ventilation	The ventilation guidance has been consistent since September 2020. Schools are to ensure their ventilation systems are in good operating condition and working properly. Where possible, schools can open windows if the weather permits and it doesn't impact the functioning of the building's ventilation system. Good indoor ventilation alone cannot protect people from exposure to

COVID-19; however, it may reduce risk when used in addition to other preventive measures.

Purpose

The [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) (public health guidance) and [addendum](#) (updated in February and May 2021, respectively) outline the infection prevention and exposure control measures that public and independent schools should implement to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It is the foundational document for the Ministry of Education's [Provincial COVID-19 Health & Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#), which outlines the principles and requirements schools must follow.

A summary of the public health guidance for parents/caregivers and students is available [here](#).

A summary of the public health guidance for school staff is available [here](#).

Guidance Development Process

The public health guidance was developed by B.C. school medical health officers, public health experts, and Ministry of Health and BC Centre of Disease Control (BCCDC) staff, with contributions from education partners. It is revised as needed, based on evolving evidence and local experiences. It was last updated in February 2021 with an addendum on mask guidance posted in March 2021.

Key considerations in developing the guidance include:

- Minimizing the transmission of COVID-19, while enabling as many students as possible to receive in-person learning.
 - The impacts of school closures on learning, child and family well-being are outlined in a [September 2020 report](#) from the BCCDC.
- Supporting schools to maintain a safe and healthy school environment, where students receive the best learning experience possible under the current circumstances.

Key evidence sources used for the February 2021 update include:

- Review of local data, including pediatric and regional data (summarized [here](#)).
- Evidence from [Canada](#), [Europe](#) and [internationally](#).
- Experience of school medical health officers providing local case management.

Resources

For Health-Care Providers

[COVID-19 Care Pediatrics](#): Provides information on COVID-19 in children, infection prevention and control, diagnosis and treatment options.

For Families

[K-12 Schools and COVID-19 Website](#): Provides public health information about COVID-19 and K-12 schools, with specific content for parents/caregivers and students, school staff, and administrators and districts. This includes:

- [K-12 Daily Health Check App](#): Students (or their parent/caregiver) are required to complete a daily health check before attending school each day. They can also use the BCCDC [When to Get Tested](#) resource, as the symptoms and subsequent recommended actions are the same.
- [COVID-19 Cases in Schools](#): Outlines what happens when somebody attends school while infectious and includes information on contact tracing and school exposure notifications.

[COVID-19 Safe Schools](#): Outlines information for staff, parents/caregivers and students about health and safety measures in schools.

[COVID-19 for the Public](#): Provides information about how individuals can protect themselves from COVID-19, and what to do if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

[COVID-19 and Children](#): Provides information for families on how COVID-19 affects children and how to keep them safe and healthy, both mentally and physically.

[Children with Immune Compromise](#): Provides guidance for families of immunocompromised children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Children with Medical Complexity](#): Provides guidance for families of children with medical complexity and their care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Child and Youth Mental Health

[Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre](#): Supports families to navigate the mental health system, including providing resources and tools.

[Foundry](#): Offers young people ages 12-24 health and wellness resources, services and supports.

Adult and Family Mental Health

[HealthLink BC](#): Provides mental health resources and is available in multiple languages.