

### 1. Are schools a likely place to be exposed to COVID-19?

The risk of exposure within a school reflects the risk of exposure within the community. However, even in communities with higher levels of community transmission, the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in schools is low when health and safety measures are in place and adhered to.

School medical officers have monitored cases of COVID-19 in schools since school started in September. They have seen that BC schools carry a low risk of transmission of COVID-19 due to the comprehensive health and safety plans in place.

Most cases of COVID-19 in BC are the result of exposures outside of schools.

### 2. What is the mask policy in schools? Why was this changed recently?

As of February 2021, masks should be worn by K-12 staff and middle/secondary students indoors at school, except when:

- Sitting or standing at their seat or workstation in a classroom or learning space; or
- There is a barrier in place; or
- Eating or drinking.

They should also wear a mask on buses.

Elementary students' mask use is based on their personal or family/caregiver's choice.

This change was made because masks were a common element in a growing body of evidence outlining health and safety measures that lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools, as well as increased confidence that masks can be worn safely by children. Local experience also suggested that they may be useful to reduce risk of transmission between adult staff members.

### 3. Why are the COVID-19 safety measures in schools different from other public settings?

Public health guidance is based on a number of factors, like:

- What measures are effective at lowering risk of transmission,
- What measures are suitable for the setting (considering what types of activities and interactions typically take place), and
- Who is in the setting.

The health and safety measures for schools were determined recognizing that schools are controlled settings. Controlled settings are those that can implement multiple health and safety measures routinely and consistently. Schools are controlled settings because:

- There is a consistent group of people who attend,
- There are robust illness policies for sick students and staff,
- Changes can be made to the activities in the setting through policy and practices that reduce risk factors, and
- Personal preventive practices (like hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette) are followed by most people most of the time.

#### 4. Is contact tracing working?

[Contact tracing](#) continues to be an integral part of B.C.'s approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic. It is working to help identify people who may have COVID-19 and support them to self-isolate to prevent COVID-19 from spreading in the community.

In B.C., contact tracing is completed as quickly as possible once public health is notified of a person testing positive for COVID-19.

Public health ensures every close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19 is notified. For close contacts at school, this will either be a phone call or letter.

#### 5. Can students be at tables together in a classroom setup?

Students can sit at the same table together.

It is best if they are not seated directly face-to-face and are spaced out as much as possible. This is especially important for older students in middle and secondary schools.

Minimizing close, prolonged, face-to-face interactions is a recommended measure to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in schools.

#### 6. What is the process for reviewing the health and safety protocols currently in place?

Schools can use the [COVID-19 Health & Safety Checklist](#) to assess their school safety plan. This outlines key health and safety measures that should be in place to help keep schools low-risk settings.

#### 7. What is the role of a school administrator in the contact tracing process? When will we be contacted, by whom and what do we need to do?

If a staff or student tests positive for COVID-19 and public health determines they may have been infectious when they attended school, a representative from public health will contact the school district. This may be the school medical officer, a public health nurse or another representative from the regional health authority.

Depending on the specific circumstances, public health will provide detailed direction on what actions the school should take, including what communications should be issued.

Additional information on the role of school administrators in contact tracing is detailed in the Ministry of Education's [COVID-19 Protocols for School and District Administrators: Management of Illness and Confirmed Cases](#).

**8. A staff member has tested positive for COVID-19, but I haven't heard from public health. What should I do?**

School administrators should follow the processes outlined in the Ministry of Education's [COVID-19 Protocols for School and District Administrators: Management of Illness and Confirmed Cases](#). This includes what communications can be issued, prior to being contacted by public health.

Public health will contact the school district or school if they determine that the person who tested positive was potentially infectious at school. This is typically a few days after the person received their test result, as public health needs to gather information to inform their investigation. More information on the contact tracing process is available [here](#).

If they determine the person who tested positive was not potentially infectious at school, they will not contact the school district or school.

Updated: February 8, 2021