COVID-19 has a very low infection rate in children (aged 0-18). There are now fewer cases across BC and public health is aware of where the disease is occurring. As such, parents and students have the option to return to in-class instruction as of June 1, 2020 with a goal of returning to full-time classes in September.

This document addresses common questions related to COVID-19 public health principles at schools. This includes staying home when sick, encouraging physical distancing and minimizing physical contact, practicing hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette and frequent cleaning and disinfecting.

Check with your health care provider or local public health unit if you have any specific concerns.

For the latest updates to this document, including answers to additional questions, please visit the FAQ resource on the BCCDC website. (http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/childcare-schools)

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What is COVID-19?
COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus. Symptoms may include:

Common symptoms:
- Fever
- Chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Loss of sense of smell or taste
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Fatigue
- Gastrointestinal issues such as diarrhea or vomiting
- Loss of appetite

Less common symptoms:
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Abdominal pain
- Skin rashes or discoloration of fingers or toes

To find the latest information about COVID-19 visit covid-19.bccdc.ca. To assess your own, use the self-assessment tool at bc.thrive.health.

How is COVID-19 spread?
COVID-19 spreads through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Respiratory droplets are small liquid particles that may travel about a metre through the air before settling on a surface. The virus is spread when a droplet comes in contact with a person’s mouth, nose or eyes.

It can also be spread when a person touches an object or surface with the virus on it, and then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes before washing their hands.

COVID-19 is not airborne (i.e. spread through particles floating in the air) and will not stay in the air for long.

Who is most at risk?
Children (aged 0-18) have had a much lower rate of COVID-19 infection than adults in BC. Children who have developed COVID-19 have most likely acquired it from adults in the household setting.

COVID-19 is more likely to spread between adults.

Some children may have a higher chance of more serious symptoms if they get COVID-19. This includes children under 1 year of age, those with weakened immune systems and those with pre-existing lung conditions.

School staff with certain underlying medical conditions, weakened immune systems, or those age 65 years or older may also have a higher chance of more serious symptoms if they get COVID-19. If any of these apply to you, or if you live with someone with any of these conditions, you can still attend school. Talk to your health care provider about the risk and steps that you should take to lower the risk to yourself and those who you live with.
Sickness at school or at home

**What is a “health-check”? When and how do we do them?**
A “health check” helps to keep track of our health and to monitor development of any symptoms of COVID-19.

School staff should learn about common COVID-19 symptoms and support students’ understanding of them. Staff should assess themselves daily for symptoms and check with students if they are feeling unwell. Encourage parents and caregivers to assess their children daily for symptoms before they get to school.

Use the self-assessment tool at [bc.thrive.health](http://bc.thrive.health) to assess symptoms.

**Can asymptomatic students and staff go to school if someone else in their household is sick?**
Asymptomatic students and staff can still go to school if someone else in their household is sick unless someone from public health has stated otherwise. If someone has been diagnosed with COVID-19, public health will ask their household contacts to stay home and self-isolate.

Anyone who feels sick should consult the self-assessment tool, call 8-1-1, or consult their health care provider. Children do not need to stay home from school while another family member is awaiting COVID-19 test results.

**What should staff and students do if they get sick while at home?**
Use the self-assessment tool at [bc.thrive.health](http://bc.thrive.health) or call 8-1-1 to assess symptoms and determine if testing is required.

Those diagnosed with COVID-19 must be excluded from work and stay home as advised by public health. This exclusion is a minimum of 10 days from the onset of symptoms, until symptoms improve and the person no longer has a fever.

Parents or caregivers must keep their child at home until they are assessed by a health care provider to exclude COVID-19.

Schools do not need to notify students, parents, caregivers and staff if someone is diagnosed with COVID-19. Information about any potential or confirmed cases should be treated as confidential. All necessary notifications will be done by public health.

*Continued ➔*
Sickness at school or at home (cont.)

Who must stay at home even if they are not sick?
If someone has travelled outside of Canada, they must self-isolate for 14 days upon return. Returning travellers who develop symptoms of COVID-19 during this time period should go for testing, but will still be required to complete their 14 days of self-isolation if they test negative. Those who test positive will be advised on further isolation by public health.

If someone was told by public health or a health care provider that they are a close contact of a COVID-19 case, self-isolation is required for 14 days from the day of last contact.

What should happen if staff or students become sick while at school?
Staff should follow the plan created and approved by the Ministry of Health, found here in Appendix B. (https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-k-12-schools.pdf)

Should students or staff with seasonal allergies stay home?
Students and staff with seasonal allergies don’t need to stay home. If the allergy symptoms are the same as they usually are during this time of year (e.g. itchy eyes, runny nose) and can be relieved with antihistamine or allergy medication, then no specific action is needed.

If students or staff are unsure if the symptoms are related to allergies, they should stay at home and contact their health care provider, use the self-assessment tool at bc.thrive.health or call 8-1-1 to assess symptoms and determine if testing is required.
**Physical distancing**

How do we practice physical distancing while at school?

Regular school activities are not restricted by the Provincial Health Officer’s Order for Mass Gatherings prohibiting gatherings of 50 people or more. However, large assemblies of staff and students where physical distancing is not possible should still be avoided.

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 all the time.

Adults should still keep 2 metres apart from each other and students. In instances where staff may not be able to keep a 2 metre distance from students due to diverse needs, they should focus on keeping as much distance as possible and minimizing physical contact.

Schools should focus on how students and staff can move around safely. You do not need to follow every example given, but should consider broadly what your school can do. Here are a few general principles to consider:

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<tr>
<th><strong>Limit access to facilities</strong></th>
<th><strong>Stagger breaks and arrivals</strong></th>
<th><strong>Spend time outdoors</strong></th>
<th><strong>Limit physical contact</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Limit access to buildings to staff and students only.</td>
<td>Stagger break times, class changes, arrivals and departures to minimize contact.</td>
<td>Sports, exercise and other lessons should be outdoors when possible.</td>
<td>Encourage students to keep their hands to themselves. Use verbal reminders, lesson plans and signs.</td>
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<td>Control access to common areas like libraries, staff break rooms and elevators.</td>
<td>Provide timed arrival and departure directions to students and parents.</td>
<td>Encourage students to spend time together outside.</td>
<td>Encourage students and staff to keep 2 metres apart when possible. This may include spacing desks apart or smaller learning groups.</td>
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<td>Put up directional signs to keep traffic flowing in hallways.</td>
<td>Ensure entrances and exits are clearly marked.</td>
<td>Close contact sports should be avoided right now.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoid assemblies and large gatherings, use virtual options.</td>
<td>Limit the number of teachers that change their classroom or learning space throughout the day.</td>
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<td>If possible, ensure separate washrooms for staff and students.</td>
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<td>Limit the number of staff who interact with students, and limit any unnecessary mixing between classes.</td>
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Is it safe for students to play together on the playground? Do we need to do anything to make playgrounds safer?

Playgrounds are a safe environment for students to play together. Focus more on minimizing physical contact between each other rather than staying 2 metres apart.

No cleaning or disinfection is required for playground structures.

All students should practice hand hygiene before and after play.

How are students and staff expected to get to and from school?

Students and staff should walk, ride their bikes or drive to school when possible. Students and staff using public transit or school buses should be encouraged to practice hand hygiene before and after their commute, cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow and avoid touching their face. Staff and older children can wear a non-medical mask if a 2 metre distance from others cannot be maintained.

If staff or students are carpooling with people outside of their households, they should try to carpool with the same people each day.
Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

What type of soap should be used for hand washing?
Liquid or foam soap is preferred for hand washing. Antibacterial soap is not required.

Students and staff should be provided time to wash their hands with soap and water before going outside and upon returning e.g. for recess, physical education or lunch breaks.

If sinks are not available (e.g., children and staff are outside), supervise the use of a Health Canada approved alcohol based hand sanitizer (https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/hand-sanitizer.html). If hands are visibly dirty, clean first before using hand sanitizer. Read labels carefully as certain products cannot be used on infants, children or by pregnant or breastfeeding staff. (https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/natural-non-prescription/legislation-guidelines/covid19-technical-grade-ethanol-hand-sanitizer.html)

All children under the age of six should be supervised when using hand sanitizer. Use enough hand sanitizer to cover the front and back of a child’s hands and between their fingers. Ensure that the hand sanitizer has dried completely before children resume regular activities and prevent children from putting wet hands in eyes or mouth.

If a child accidentally consumes any amount of hand sanitizer, call the BC Poison Control Centre: 1-800-567-8911.

Do we need to use warm water to wash hands?
No, you can use any temperature of water to wash your hands. Cold water and warm water are equally effective at cleaning hands as long as soap is used.

Can we wash our hands with tap water if there is a boil water advisory?
Yes, it’s safe to wash your hands with soap and tap water if you are living in a community with a Boil Water Advisory (BWA) or a Do Not Consume (DNC) advisory. However, if you are living under a Do Not Use (DNU) advisory you should wash your hands with bottled water.

When should hand hygiene be practiced?
Encourage hand washing often. See Appendix C on the Ministry of Health school guidelines for suggestions on when to wash hands. (https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-k-12-schools.pdf)

Promote proper and frequent handwashing through signs, announcements, in-class lessons and scheduling time for hand hygiene. All sinks should be supplied with liquid or foam soap.

If sinks are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. If hands are visibly soiled, wipe your hands before using hand sanitizer, or avoid touching your face or any food or beverage until you can access soap and water.

Continued →
Why are masks not recommended for children?
The COVID-19 guidelines for schools provide a safe setting for both staff and students. Therefore, masks are not generally recommended nor necessary. However, some staff and older children may choose to wear non-medical masks. ([https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-k-12-schools.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-guidance-k-12-schools.pdf))

For young children, masks are not recommended. Masks can be irritating and may lead to increased touching of the face and eyes. If an older child wants to wear a mask, show them how to do so safely and properly. Remind children that other children and adults have reasons for wearing or not wearing masks, so it is important to be kind and respectful to others. ([http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID19_SurgicalMaskPoster.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID19_SurgicalMaskPoster.pdf))

School staff should monitor and address any discrimination or bullying associated with mask wearing, whether it is experienced by those who do or do not wear masks.

Why do staff members not need to wear masks?
Non-medical masks are recommended only when a person is in an uncontrolled environment in the public and cannot maintain 2 metres of physical space from others (e.g. when they are on public transit).

Schools are implementing environmental, administrative and personal infection prevention and control measures to create a controlled environment and reduce the transmission of COVID-19. Therefore use of non-medical masks in this setting is not necessary.

Managing students with complex behaviours, on a delegated care plan or experiencing a health emergency may require staff to be in close physical proximity with the student. No additional personal protective equipment are needed unless advised by public health or workplace policies.

Wearing a mask in a school setting is a personal choice. It is important to treat people wearing masks with respect.
Cleaning

How often should surfaces be cleaned?
Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces twice daily. This includes door knobs, light switches, toilet handles, water fountains, tables, desks, chairs, keyboards and toys.

General cleaning and disinfecting should happen at least once per day. Clean toys in the classroom daily with soap and water and then disinfect with a store-bought product or bleach solution. Find more information here. (http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/cleaning-and-disinfecting)

If a shared object cannot be disinfected, for example a plush toy, avoid using it for now. Encourage students not to bring any objects from home unless they are necessary (e.g., school supplies, water bottles).

Is it safe to share books and other paper documents?
There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted via textbooks, paper or other paper-based products. As such, there is no need to limit the distribution or sharing of books or paper based educational resources to students because of COVID-19.
Activities

How can physical activity be done safely?
Sports, exercise and other lessons should be outdoors when possible. Group sports activities should be organized in a thoughtful way, taking into consideration physical distancing. Avoid close contact sports for now. Hand hygiene is encouraged before and after play.

Can students share sports equipment?
Yes, students can share sports equipment. However, students should wash their hands before and after play.

Is it okay to sing in groups?
Singing in groups can be a safe activity if people are able to stand 2 metres apart. Other hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette principles should be practiced.
Mental health

How can staff support the mental health of students?
COVID-19 affects more than our physical well-being. With so much happening, it's normal to feel worried and overwhelmed. Mental wellness, in particular stress, also impacts our physical well-being and our behaviours which can increase our risk of getting sick.

It's important to focus on your own, as well as student and staff, mental well-being. Erase is a Government of BC resource focused on building safe and caring school communities. Visit their website for a list of mental health resources for parents and caregivers, students and staff. ([https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase/mental-health](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase/mental-health))
Can staff share the use of microwaves, refrigerators, photocopiers, coffee pots, etc?
Yes, staff can share appliances and other objects. Treat things like microwaves as high touch surfaces. Disinfect them at least twice per day. Always practice hand hygiene before and after handling shared objects.

It’s been mentioned that good ventilation can help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Do we need to increase ventilation in the schools? How would we do that?
There is no need for enhanced ventilation in public buildings to prevent the spread of COVID-19. There is no concern around use of air conditioning and fans. Opening windows for fresh air is encouraged.

Consider operating HVAC systems throughout the day and night to keep the air moving. Ensure the systems are maintained for optimal normal function.