

Post-Secondary Public Health Guidance:

Date: September 28, 2023

Introduction

This document provides public health guidance for staff, students and visitors at post-secondary institutions regarding measures to prevent and reduce spread of communicable diseases, including COVID-19 and influenza.

The guidelines were developed by a team of experts from B.C.'s post-secondary sector, the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, regional health authorities and the BC Centre for Disease Control.

The prevention measures detailed in this document have been very effective at reducing the spread of communicable diseases such as COVID-19, influenza and other common respiratory viruses. Post-secondary institutions are encouraged to incorporate these recommended prevention measures as everyday guidance.

Recommendations for Individuals

Health Awareness

Staff, students and visitors should stay home if they are sick and unable to participate fully in routine activities. Administrators can support this practice by communicating the importance of not attending school when sick and should encourage a health check.

A health check means a person regularly checking to ensure they are not experiencing symptoms of illness that would limit their ability to participate fully in regular activities before coming to campus to prevent the spread of communicable diseases within post-secondary settings. Continue to do your daily health checks and follow all of the prevention measures in the [communicable disease guidance](#).

There is no need to monitor staff, students or visitors for symptoms of illness.

What to do When Sick

Staff, students, or visitors who are exhibiting symptoms of illness, such as respiratory illness, should stay home until they are well enough to participate in regular activities or otherwise advised by a healthcare provider. Those experiencing certain illnesses, such as gastrointestinal illness caused by norovirus, may be advised to

stay home for longer. Staff, students, or other persons can attend if their symptoms are consistent with a previously diagnosed health condition (e.g., seasonal allergies) or symptoms have improved, and they feel well enough to return to regular activities or otherwise advised by a healthcare provider. If you are unsure or concerned about your symptoms, connect with your health care provider or call 8-1-1.

If a staff member, student, or other person develops symptoms of illness at the institution and is unable to participate in regular activities, they should be supported to go home until their symptoms have improved or are otherwise advised by a healthcare provider. They may use a mask if they are experiencing respiratory symptoms.

Post-secondary institutions should not require a health care provider's note (i.e. a doctor's note) to confirm the health status of any individual, beyond those required to support medical accommodation as per usual practice.

Hand Hygiene

Regular hand washing with plain soap and water or using an [effective hand sanitizer](#) reduces the spread of illness. Everyone should practice diligent hand hygiene and institutions should facilitate regular opportunities for students and staff to wash their hands. To learn about how to perform hand hygiene, please refer to the BCCDC's [hand hygiene poster](#).

Respiratory Etiquette

Institutions can reinforce good respiratory etiquette practices among staff, students, and visitors including:

- Coughing or sneezing into their elbow or a tissue. Throw away used tissues and immediately perform hand hygiene.
- Refrain from touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Refrain from sharing any food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, or vaping devices.

Non-Medical Masks and Face Coverings

The decision to wear a mask is a personal one, based on individual preference. Some staff, students or visitors may choose to wear a non-medical mask or face covering throughout the day or for certain activities. The choice of whether people practice additional personal prevention measures should be respected. Information on non-medical masks is available from the [BCCDC](#).

Vaccination

Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of serious illness from many communicable diseases, such as COVID-19 and influenza. Students and staff are encouraged to ensure they are up to date on [all recommended vaccines for communicable diseases](#). Vaccines are available to all faculty, students, and staff, including international students and their families. The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has specific information on getting vaccinated for [students arriving in B.C.](#) from within and outside of Canada. Post-secondary institutions are encouraged to share evidenced based information and promote opportunities to be vaccinated in partnership with public health. For administrators and staff, more information on vaccination and communicable disease prevention in the workplace is available on the [Work Safe B.C.](#) website. Evidence-based immunization information and tools for B.C. residents are available from the [BCCDC](#) and [ImmunizeBC](#) websites.

Some experiential learning placements (including practicum, clinical, and co-op placements) may require students to be vaccinated in line with practices for other employees. This currently includes health sciences students working in certain health care settings by Order of the Provincial Health Officer. Post-secondary institutions should share information with students and affected employees about vaccine requirements associated with their academic programs.

Recommendations for Post-Secondary Institutions

Ventilation and Air Exchange

Continue to ensure all mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are designed, operated, and maintained as per standards and specifications for ongoing comfort of students and staff ([Part 4 of OHS Regulation](#)), and that they are working properly. Windows may be opened when the weather permits if it does not impact the functioning of ventilation systems.

Cleaning and Disinfection

Regular cleaning and disinfection can help prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Cleaning of frequently touched surfaces should occur in line with regular practices and when visibly dirty.

Food Safety

Post-secondary institutes that provide food services regulated under the [Food Premises Regulation](#) should adhere to the required measures (e.g. a FOODSAFE trained staff member, a food safety plan, etc.). For special events or sites requiring food permits, please consult your local health authority environmental health officer.

Staff, students, or other persons in the institutional setting should also follow routine food safety practices, including diligent hand hygiene. More information may be found on the [BCCDC Food Safety webpage](#).

Gatherings and Events

School extracurricular and social gatherings and events (including those occurring within and between institutions), regardless of location, can occur in line with the guidance in this document.

Visitors and Community Use of Institution Facilities

Post-secondary institutes can follow normal practices for welcoming visitors and community use of its facilities.