

May 27, 2020

## **Re: A Safe Return to School in the Fraser Health Region**

Dear School Administrators, Staff, Students and Parents

Through careful evidence-based planning by public health experts and in accordance with BC's Restart Plan, students can voluntarily return to school on a part-time basis starting June 1, 2020. With effective public health measures in place, BC has done an excellent job of decreasing the community spread of COVID-19.

Scientific evidence on COVID-19 has guided the provincial response to school reopening. Data has shown that children and youth are at a much lower risk of becoming infected with COVID-19, and if they become infected, they generally have milder symptoms. Children primarily get sick from other household members, and not from school settings. There is also no conclusive evidence that children who are asymptomatic pose a risk to other children or to adults.

The [Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings](#) provides strong guidance and measures for schools in British Columbia in order to maintain the health and safety of staff and students while at school. As outlined in the guidance, school administrators, staff, students and parents can contribute to the health and safety of the school environment through important measures, including:

### 1. Staying Home When Sick

- All staff and students who have symptoms of COVID-19 **OR** travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days **OR** were identified as a close contact of a confirmed case or outbreak must stay home and self-isolate.
- Staff must assess themselves daily, and parents and caregivers must assess their child daily for [symptoms of COVID-19](#), common cold, influenza, or other respiratory disease before going to school.
- If a student or staff becomes ill at school, they must go home as soon as possible.
- There is no public health restriction from working in the school environment due to age, medical conditions or pregnancy. Children and adults with compromised immune systems or underlying medical conditions should talk to their family physician to understand the risks of COVID-19 and what additional precautions they should take for their situation.

### 2. Performing Diligent Hand Hygiene

- Thorough hand washing with plain soap and water for at least 20 seconds is the most effective way to reduce the spread of illness.
- Where sinks are unavailable, use alcohol-based hand rubs with at least 60% alcohol.
- Hand hygiene should be practiced throughout the day and especially upon arrival at school, before and after any breaks, before and after eating and drinking, after using the toilet, after sneezing or coughing into hands, and whenever hands are visibly dirty.

3. Practicing Respiratory and Personal Hygiene
  - Staff and students should cough or sneeze into their elbow sleeve or a tissue, refrain from touching their face with unwashed hands, and refrain from sharing any food, drinks or unwashed utensils.
  - Wearing masks at school is not recommended, as there is no current evidence of their effectiveness at school. Wearing a mask is a personal choice.
  
4. Physical Distancing and Minimizing Physical Contact
  - Physical distancing strategies are implemented where possible, such as re-arranging desks, organizing students into smaller groups, staggering pick-up and drop-off times, staggering breaks, incorporating more outdoor learning activities, and avoiding physical contact. Outdoor playgrounds are a safe environment, and appropriate hand hygiene practices should be used before, during and after outdoor play.
  - Assemblies and other school-wide events should be held virtually to avoid a large number of people gathered in one space.
  - Some students will require one-on-one support. This care should continue to be provided and appropriate hand hygiene and cleaning measures should be practiced. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is not required when working in close proximity with students, unless they are used by staff as part of regular precautions, such as when cleaning blood or bodily fluids.
  
5. Cleaning and Disinfecting
  - Regular cleaning and disinfection are essential to preventing the transmission of COVID-19 from contaminated objects and surfaces. Schools should be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with the BCCDC's [Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings](#) document.
  - General cleaning and disinfecting of schools should occur at least once a day, and frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day.

If someone displays symptoms of COVID-19 or is concerned, they can call 8-1-1 or use the online self-assessment tool, [bc.thrive.health](https://bc.thrive.health). If a student or a school staff member tests positive for COVID-19, public health staff will ensure there is robust contact tracing and management of any clusters or outbreaks. They will also ensure that children, staff and parents have access to health care providers and that appropriate supports are in place.

If school administrators, staff, students or parents have questions, you can contact the Fraser Health Population and Public Health COVID Call Centre at 604-918-7532.

Sincerely,



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