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Approach to reopening schools for the 2020-2021 school year

Read our approach to reopen schools so students can continue learning, and find out how we're keeping the health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff our top priorities.

Introduction

The health, safety and well-being of students and staff is a top priority as the government plans to reopen schools for the 2020-21 school year.

Clearly, the government would like to have students back in class this September learning through conventional delivery with school every weekday, with class sizes that reflect current regulations, with regular social interaction and extra-curricular activities.

In planning for the resumption of instruction in the fall, it is critical to balance the risk of direct infection and transmission of COVID-19 in children with the impact of school closures on their physical and mental health. Current evidence and experience support the concept that children can return to school in a carefully structured manner that protects children's health and minimizes risks from a public health perspective.

The government will be requesting guidance from public health or public health units by early August in order to confirm the type of delivery appropriate for the beginning of the school year.

We have asked school boards to be prepared with their plan for the upcoming school year by August 4, should it be needed.

Relationships between schools and local public health units will be crucial to navigate the complex and evolving COVID-19 environment, planning and reopening schools, and addressing other child health issues that emerge.

Specific guidance to support the development of health and safety protocols in the school and student transportation settings is attached in appendices of this document.

Voluntary school attendance

The return to school in the fall of 2020-21 will be voluntary and based on parent choice. For parents who choose not to send their child back to school, school boards should be prepared to offer remote education. This requirement will be in place for as long as public health circumstances require adapted delivery of education.

School organization and timetabling

The current public health circumstances related to COVID-19 will require Ontario school boards to prepare for a range of delivery circumstances for the 2020-21 school year.

In light of the continuing uncertainty about public health risks, school boards will be asked to prepare for:

- normal school day routine with enhanced public health protocols
- modified school day routine based on smaller class sizes, cohorting and alternative day or week delivery, and
- at-home learning with ongoing enhanced remote delivery

The ministry will stay in close communication with school boards through June and July, and to provide further guidance based on the latest public health advice in early August to prepare for school opening.

School boards may need to be nimble and adopt one or more of these forms of delivery through the school year, and be able to move between these forms of delivery depending on public health circumstances.

To the greatest extent possible, boards are encouraged to assign students, teachers and educational assistants and ECEs to class groupings as they would in a conventional school year, so that class groupings can be maintained despite the form of delivery that is in place at any one time.

Modified school-day routine

Should public health conditions allow for the re-opening of schools, it could be under adapted conditions that prioritize student and staff health and safety.

The ministry is drawing on two key aspects of health advice: “distancing” and “cohorting”.

“Distancing” refers to the advice that individuals should avoid close personal contact and maintain 2 meters of separation for any prolonged encounters.

“Cohorting” refers to minimizing the number of students and teachers any individual comes in contact with, and to maintaining consistency in those contacts as much as possible.

Together, these approaches lead to the advice that school boards should adopt adapted delivery models that:

- maintain a limit of 15 students in a typical classroom at one time
- adopt timetabling that would allow, to the greatest extent practical, for students to remain in contact with only their classmates and a single teacher for as much of the school day as possible

This approach has a number of implications:

- maintaining a limit of 15 or fewer students in a classroom will require alternate day or week delivery to a segment of the class at one time
- students not in class for a day or days would need to be assigned curriculum linked work; where possible, students not in class could participate in synchronous learning with their classmates for a period of the school day
- teachers would need to prepare lesson plans that could be delivered through alternate day or week timetables, where part of a student’s timetable would be in school learning and part would be remote learning
- boards would need to consider providing students with a high level of special education needs, for whom remote learning may be challenging, the option of attending school every day
- a range of timetabling models could be developed to support local circumstances
- the need to limit rotating teachers would require adaptation to the delivery of subjects such as French or Anglais, art, music, and physical education
- students and teachers would be encouraged to remain in their classroom and to move as a cohort to entrances, exits, or other spaces within the school
- teachers would be encouraged to establish virtual staff rooms and not congregate before arriving in, or returning to their classrooms
- where a large class size would not permit alternate day delivery even with cohorts of 15, boards would be encouraged to form additional classes led by specialist or untimetabled teachers.

At the secondary level, additional adaptations may be required to minimize the circulation of students and the mixing of students outside of a class cohort.

The ministry anticipates that schools and boards will identify a range of timetabling and delivery approaches that reflect the goals of distancing and cohorting and is willing to review and discuss all reasonable adaptations.

Special education classes

Where schools have smaller classes, such as congregated classrooms for students’ special education needs, boards are encouraged to offer regular, everyday timetabling. Where these classes involve close physical contact between teachers, educational assistants and students, guidance is provided in the appended Health and Safety protocol for appropriate use of PPE.

Labs, technical education, co-op and experiential learning

It is recognized that schools and boards provide a wide range of educational experiences, and that many classes and programs are offered in specialized classrooms and in workplaces. Schools and boards are asked to consider how these classes could continue to occur while respecting distancing and cohorting approaches. In some cases, cleaning protocols may need to be aligned with the use of specialized classrooms and equipment.

Where students are engaged in experiential education, such as students in Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM), Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) or School-College-Work Initiative (SCWI) programs, schools should take into consideration the work environment that the student will be learning and working in. Virtual and online options for these programs may be available as well as options to continue these programs in workplaces, training and college locations. Where needed, public health guidance should be sought.

Adaptations for the school environment

Other preparations that boards and schools would be asked to undertake include:

- Develop procedures that support general physical distancing, such as spreading students into different areas; using visual cues such as tape on the floor, corridors, bathrooms and outside areas; scheduling recess in small groups and holding physical education or other classes outdoors.
- Limit parents and visitors inside the school.
- Consider using signage/markings to direct students through the steps for entry and exit of the school building.
- Minimize the number of personal belongings (e.g., backpack, clothing, sunscreen, etc.) and, if brought, asking that belongings be labeled and kept in the child's designated area.
- Develop guidance for lunches and lunch room or cafeteria areas, as well as other shared areas of schools, such as libraries and gyms.

Child care and before- and after-school programs

- School Boards would be required to work with their Service System Managers, Child Care Operators and Authorized Recreation providers to ensure that child care and before- and after-school programming are available to support children and families.
- This would include protection of designated child care centre space for child care centres in schools and an approach to supporting shared spaces, including cleaning protocols.

At-home learning with remote delivery

Should the school closure be extended, or should some parents choose not to send their child back to school, school boards should be prepared to offer remote education. Remote education should be delivered online to the greatest extent possible, including the establishment of minimum expectations for students to have direct synchronous contact with their teacher on a regular basis. Synchronous learning can be used as part of whole class instruction, in smaller groups of students, and/or in a one-on-one context.

Boards should continue to extend arrangements that provide devices and internet connectivity to students who would otherwise not be able to access remote learning and ensure platforms are accessible for persons with disabilities. Boards should also consider standardizing the choice of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and providing training to all educators, to ensure their familiarity and fluency with the LMS, and with board policies on appropriate use, including issues related to cyber security and privacy.

School boards can continue to enrol interested students in TVO's Independent Learning Centre (ILC). Students and families seeking to take ILC courses should be encouraged to connect with their guidance department and/or school principal to discuss next steps.

The primary focus of instruction through remote learning will be on the achievement of overall expectations across all subjects and grades. Students participating in remote learning should be timetabled and provided with a schedule of classes that are teacher-facilitated and support all areas of curriculum, as they normally would in school instruction.

Lessons and assigned work should cover overall curriculum expectations across subjects and grades. The Ministry recommends that, to the greatest extent possible, assessment, evaluation and reporting activities would proceed as usual, with a focus on the achievement of overall expectations and the primary purpose of assessment and evaluation being to improve student learning.

Where assessment approaches have relied on exams, culminating activities, such as performance tasks, demonstrations, projects, and essays can be used instead to determine students' grades or marks.

Ensuring academic success

While the 2020-21 school year may look and feel different in many ways, the Ministry remains committed to doing everything it can to support students' learning, growth and development. This section discusses options for Refresher Learning, Curriculum and Assessment Adaptations, Support for Students with Special Education Needs, and Celebrations, Sports and Extracurriculars.

Refresher learning

The goal of "Refresher Learning" is to recognize what students have learned from their experience during the school closure period and to ensure students are well supported for their ongoing learning in the next year or course. The Ministry is supportive of various components for Refresher Learning, including:

- Providing resources for educators on how to support student well-being.
- Providing content review for students integrated throughout the school year at key instructional times to ensure students have fundamental building blocks before each new unit.

Some students, such as those with learning disabilities, may require additional time and supports to close the gaps in their learning. Boards could consider planning for early transition visits for students with special education needs and mental health needs to help refamiliarize them with the school environment and establish routines.

Adapted curriculum delivery

The primary focus of instruction will be on the achievement of overall expectations across all subjects and grades. Curriculum delivery may depend on the adapted school environment model that is implemented in each school. Aligned with adaptations made to the school environment, proposed approaches to adapting curriculum delivery could include, for example:

In Elementary:

- One teacher staying with a group of children all day, teaching all areas of the curriculum
- Remote curriculum delivery while students are at home
- Scheduling one period per day where a teacher links a class in school to classmates at home via synchronous learning
- Rotary and specialist teachers joining classrooms via remote or smartboard devices

In Secondary:

- Shortened periods of in-person instruction in the morning with blended online and independent learning in the afternoons.
- A block schedule, with one course taught in a 6-7 week block in-person and one full-semester online course
- Cohorted Grade 9 and 10 compulsory courses in person with elective courses and Grade 11 and 12 courses taught online

Adapted assessment

The Ministry recommends that, to the greatest extent possible, assessment, evaluation and reporting activities proceed as usual, with a focus on the achievement of overall expectations and the primary purpose of assessment and evaluation being to improve student learning.

Report cards, including Progress Reports and the Kindergarten Initial Observation and Communication of Learning should be provided for all students, including those who may plan to only participate through remote learning.

Where assessment approaches have relied on exams, culminating activities, such as performance tasks, demonstrations, projects, and essays can be used instead to determine students' grades or marks.

With regard to [EQAO](#) and other assessments, the Ministry is considering adaptations for 2020-21.

Requirements for graduation

Boards must ensure that course options allow students to earn compulsory credits required for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), as well as providing access to types of elective courses that support all postsecondary pathway destinations. To that end, unless otherwise directed by the Ministry based on advice by public health authorities, at this time the Ministry is confirming:

- Students would be required to earn 40 hours of community involvement hours to graduate in 2020-21. Students should continue to seek out and accumulate community involvement hours as per [PPM 124](#) and their respective board's policies and procedures, keeping in mind local public health unit recommendations and the possibility of virtual community involvement.
- Secondary students would be required to complete the literacy graduation requirement to graduate in the 2020-21 school year

Support for students with special needs

The Ministry recognizes the unique challenges experienced by students with special education needs during this time, and that additional supports will be required to help these students learn and thrive as schools reopen. Guidance to support students with special education needs should include:

- Considering changes in the school environment and/or remote learning needs when reviewing and updating Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- Considering additional planning and transition time for students with special education needs to support a smoother transition to school
- Safely supporting the return of medically fragile students by consulting with local public health authorities on options for personal protective equipment (PPE), staff training, and potential continued remote learning where return is not possible
- Accommodating the needs of students who require significant personal support, including considering options for personal protective equipment for both staff and students
- Providing guidance relating to assistive technology
- Considering alternate attendance options for students depending on their needs
- Working with partners to develop local protocols for the access of non-school based providers, such as rehabilitation therapists and nursing staff, and supporting remote delivery of these services where in-school delivery is not possible

Celebrations, sports and extracurriculars

COVID-19 has resulted in the cancellation or delay of milestone events to recognize student achievement, such as proms and graduation ceremonies, and will impact the kinds of sports and extracurricular activities that can safely be offered. Recognizing that these events and activities are an integral part of the school experience for many students, boards are advised to reschedule or restage these events when

possible (either in-person or through online options), and resume sports and extracurricular activities that can safely continue based on input from local medical officers of health.

Online capacity and technology readiness

To meet the needs of students during this time, Ontario's education system needs to be prepared to fluidly transition between online and in-person modes of learning. Boards will need to give careful consideration to students who are not able to attend school in person based on a variety of reasons, such as parent choice or health considerations.

To increase board preparedness for remote learning, boards should consider:

- Extending arrangements that provided devices and internet connectivity to students who would otherwise not be able to access remote learning.
- Ensuring platforms are accessible for persons with disabilities
- Standardizing the choice of Learning Management Systems (LMS) and providing training to all educators, to ensure their familiarity and fluency with the LMS, and with board policies on appropriate use, including issues related to cyber security and privacy
- Ensuring teachers in elementary and secondary are prepared with subject/course specific content, lessons, activities and assignments in the LMS should there be a need to transition at any time from in-person instruction to remote learning
- Ensuring that teachers and other educators are prepared to offer synchronous learning opportunities to students as a consistent and regular part of their remote learning plan

The Ministry recognizes that students living in areas with low internet connectivity may continue to experience challenges in accessing online learning. The Ministry will continue to work with school boards to extend the availability of devices and connectivity throughout the province, and to identify options for students and staff where internet availability is limited. The ministry would also work with school boards to develop guidance on remote learning for students with special education needs.

Health and safety

Physical health

To support the reopening of schools in Ontario, schools will need to implement protocols to provide for the health and safety of students, staff and families. Guidance is provided based on the advice of public health and the Ministries of Health and Labour Training and Skills Development.

To maximize safety, schools should use a "layered" approach with multiple measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread, including decreasing the number of interactions with others and increasing the safety of interactions. Layering of multiple mitigation measures strengthens the risk mitigation potential overall. Protocols should consider measures related to:

- Modifying behaviours that reduce the spread, including hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, as well as use of personal protective equipment (PPE) where recommended.
- Maintaining healthy environments, including environmental cleaning, cohorting and physical distancing.
- Maintaining healthy operations, including mitigating risks for students at higher risk of infection, protecting staff and at-risk persons or families, screening and management of individuals with suspected COVID-19, cases and outbreaks.

Please refer to [Appendix 1](#) for further guidance.

Mental health and well-being

Student mental health and well-being should be a core element of the re-entry to school plan. It is foundational in ensuring a return to a welcoming environment that supports learning.

Supports for student mental health and well-being could include the following components:

- Professional learning for system leaders, educators and mental health professionals to support the approach to school re-entry, as well as throughout the school year
- A tiered approach for mental health supports that will capture all students and target intensive help to those who have been most affected by the COVID-19 outbreak
- Collaboration with child and youth mental health agencies to support stronger connections and make the best use of mental health resources and supports across the integrated system of care

Prior to school starting, School Mental Health Ontario will provide school boards with a professional learning framework and toolkit to support the mental health of all students that can be tailored at the board and school level for different audiences. The professional learning will have a strong focus on building students' social-emotional learning skills so that they can build resilience, manage their stress and build positive relationships.

Cleaning schools

Additional cleaning protocols will need to be implemented. These could include:

- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and shared resources such as doorknobs, water fountain knobs, light switches, toilet and faucet handles, electronic devices, students' chairs and desks/tabletops at least twice a day, as they are most likely to become contaminated.
- Following public health advice regarding the type of cleaning and disinfectant products to use
- Following the manufacturer's instructions including with respect to use of PPE

Staff screening and self-assessment

Self-assessment tools should be made available to staff to ensure awareness of possible symptoms of COVID-19. Staff who suspect they may have symptoms should stay home and seek testing.

Some staff may need to self-identify a health concern or a health concern of a family member who may prefer an assignment that does not regularly bring them into contact with students. School boards should follow their normal human resource practices in these circumstances, with a heightened awareness of the context of COVID-19.

Testing and contact tracing

Schools and school boards should be prepared for the event of a student or staff member having a positive test for COVID-19. Schools should have a protocol based on local public health advice that includes:

- A clear notification protocol to public health in the event of a suspected case and positive test result
- The readiness to provide contact information for other students or staff who would be considered close contacts - schools should be able to quickly provide contact information to public health for class cohorts and school bus cohorts of a student or staff member who receives a positive test result and pay enhanced attention to collecting contact information for students and adaptation to student and staff information systems, so that contact information is readily available
- A close relationship with their local public health units so that the testing centre that contacts would be directed to is easily identifiable

Public health will provide guidance on the range of contacts who should be advised to seek testing.

Communications to parents

The Ministry recognizes that the success of the school reopening plan will depend in part on parents being informed about new protocols and confident that the approach will keep their children safe. To that end, boards should clearly communicate expectations and provide guidelines to parents and students well before in-class instruction resumes, and ongoing throughout the year. Communication strategies could include:

- Prioritizing digital communications, such as fact sheets explaining new protocols and links to helpful information, as well as detailed instructions regarding screening and pick-up/drop-off procedures and protocols if a child or staff person becomes ill.
- Considering alternative delivery models for activities such as parent-teacher conferences and school assemblies.
- Providing clear guidelines and procedures for drop-off and pick-up to support physical distancing.
- Providing information for students related to school hours, physical distancing, hand hygiene, remote learning, and resources to support learning and well-being at home.

Student transportation

As a result of physical distancing expectations, the ministry acknowledges that transportation planning will be challenging due to the reduction in vehicle capacity to accommodate students, which may result in school boards and consortia transporting fewer students. Given local circumstances differ across the province, school boards, in partnership with their local health units, should determine what protocols are required as well as any subsequent impacts to service levels. The ministry encourages school boards, together with their consortia, to refer to Transport Canada's recently issued [Federal Guidance for School Bus Operations](https://www.tc.gc.ca/en/services/road/federal-guidance-school-bus-operations-during-COVID-19-pandemic.html) (<https://www.tc.gc.ca/en/services/road/federal-guidance-school-bus-operations-during-COVID-19-pandemic.html>) and to consider the following:

- Encouraging active forms of travel or private transportation by parents and caregivers, where possible, to ease pressure on transportation demand.
- Reviewing transportation eligibility policies (e.g., walk distances, courtesy rider) to focus available transportation capacity on students who would be unable to reach school without it.
- Surveying parent intentions to assess transportation service needs (e.g., through a transportation opt-in process).

- Supporting physical distancing between students on school vehicles by considering planning parameters of one student per seat (unless the students are in the same household) and having students from the same classroom cohort sit in the same area, where possible.
- Where physical distancing is not possible, consider the use of non-medical face coverings or masks for students.
- Reviewing planning parameters such as limiting transfers and the number of students at a bus stop, to reduce exposure.
- Enhancing cleaning protocols for frequently touched surfaces (e.g., handrails, seatbacks) to at least twice daily.
- Making alcohol-based hand sanitizer available on vehicles.
- Assessing whether the use of personal protective equipment (e.g., surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (face shield or goggles)) for school bus drivers, school bus monitors, and student aides is necessary if they are unable to maintain physical distancing when transporting students.
- Supporting accommodations for immunocompromised students, medically vulnerable students, and students with special transportation needs.

Please refer to [Appendix 2](#) for further guidance.

Collaboration with employee representatives

The Ministry recognizes that school re-opening will require continued flexibility on the part of school boards and education staff as they adjust to adapted delivery models. Schools and school boards represent the workplace of almost 200,000 staff. The health and safety of school board staff must be a priority for school boards as employers. The health and safety protocol document offers significant guidance to ensure that schools and boards as workplaces remain safe.

The significant adaptations that may be necessary in the next school year will require careful communication and collaboration with teacher federations, education worker unions and employee representatives. School boards are encouraged to work closely with these partners as they undertake planning for the next school year.

Governance and administration

Board meetings

School boards should plan to continue to convene board meetings in online formats, with provision for public participation.

Board administration

Boards should plan for a gradual return to work for board staff who work in board administration offices, based on local public health guidance for workplaces.

Funding and reporting adaptations

The ministry will continue to assess where funding and reporting arrangements need to be adapted to reflect school boards and public health circumstances.

Enrolment recording and reporting

School boards and the ministry have well established methodologies for counting and reporting enrolment, based on count dates which remain unchanged. Given the need for adapted timetables and maintaining class cohorts, class size compliance requirements will be based on the pre-registration enrolment to limit class reorganizations (further information below).

The ministry will monitor and work with school boards to avoid any impacts or constraints in reporting enrolment, such as recognizing enrolment for students who choose to participate in online schooling only.

Pre-registration

Given the requirement to carefully assign students to classes, and to cohorts with alternating schedules, the typical ability of schools to accommodate late registrations will not be viable for the coming school year.

School boards maintain robust registration processes throughout the summer, although many students and families do register at the very beginning of the school year. This can lead to walk-in timetabling and irregular class sizes up until the September reorganization compliance date.

For the upcoming school year, the ministry will support firm cut-off dates for school registration, to support boards in achieving a safe and predictable school year start-up. Students and families seeking to register past these cut-off dates will have to wait to be assigned to a school, class and timetable.

Pre-registration would need to be widely communicated to parents for awareness and could require a declaration of whether parents wish in-school instruction or remote learning.

Timelines and other considerations

To support school boards in preparing to re-open, the Ministry suggests that boards formulate their plan for reopening by late July. The Ministry contemplates requesting guidance from public health or public health units, by early August in order to confirm the form of delivery supportable for the beginning of the school year.

The ministry will be reaching out to arrange meetings to discuss board plans with senior board staff in late July, and where necessary, to arrange for key operating requirements to be guided by public health and pediatric health advice.

Appendix 1

Health and safety protocols

COVID-19 guidance: schools

This guidance document provides information only. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, diagnosis, treatment or legal advice. In the event of any conflict between this guidance document and any orders or directive issued by the Minister of Health or the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), the order or directive prevails.

Please check Ontario's [COVID-19 website](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx) (http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx) regularly for information, the [COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms \(PDF\)](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf) (http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf), mental health resources, and other information.

In planning for the resumption of in-class instruction in schools, it is critical to balance the risk of direct infection and transmission of COVID-19 in children with the impact of school closure on their physical and mental health. Current evidence and experience support the concept that children can return to school in a carefully structured manner that maximizes children's health and minimizes risks from a public health perspective.

It can be anticipated that children and youth may experience increased stress and anxiety related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the physical health and safety guidance provided below, it will be critical to provide mental health support services adapted for diverse groups and populations.

To support the reopening of schools for in-class in Ontario, schools should implement protocols to provide for the health and safety of students, families and staff:

- Schools are required to follow all existing worker health and safety requirements, as outlined in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations
- Schools must follow any further direction given by the local medical officer of health
- Relationships between schools and local public health units will be crucial to navigate the complex and evolving COVID-19 pandemic environment, planning and reopening schools, and addressing other child health issues that emerge
- Schools should also engage with First Nation partners/communities to plan and support the safe return of First Nation students on reserve who normally attend provincial schools

To maximize safety, schools should use a "layered" approach with multiple measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread, including decreasing the number of interactions with others and increasing the safety of interactions. Layering of multiple mitigation measures strengthens the risk mitigation potential overall. The Public Health Agency of Canada has technical guidance on COVID-19 for schools and community settings:

- Risk mitigation tool for child and youth settings operating during the COVID-19 pandemic: [English](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/covid-19-risk-mitigation-tool-child-youth-settings-operating-during-pandemic.html) (<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/covid-19-risk-mitigation-tool-child-youth-settings-operating-during-pandemic.html>) [French](https://www.canada.ca/fr/sante-publique/services/maladies/2019-nouveau-coronavirus/document-orientation/covid-19-outil-attenuation-risques-destine-etablissements-enfants-jeunes-activite-pendant-pandemie.html) (<https://www.canada.ca/fr/sante-publique/services/maladies/2019-nouveau-coronavirus/document-orientation/covid-19-outil-attenuation-risques-destine-etablissements-enfants-jeunes-activite-pendant-pandemie.html>)
- Risk mitigation tool for outdoor recreation spaces and activities operating during the COVID-19 pandemic: [English](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/risk-mitigation-tool-outdoor-recreation-spaces-activities-operating-covid-19.html) (<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/risk-mitigation-tool-outdoor-recreation-spaces-activities-operating-covid-19.html>) [French](https://www.canada.ca/fr/sante-publique/services/maladies/2019-nouveau-coronavirus/document-orientation/outil-attenuation-risques-lies-activites-espaces-recreatifs-exterieurs-covid-19.html) (<https://www.canada.ca/fr/sante-publique/services/maladies/2019-nouveau-coronavirus/document-orientation/outil-attenuation-risques-lies-activites-espaces-recreatifs-exterieurs-covid-19.html>)
- Training/refresher learning of school staff should include health and safety protocols.
- Clear, age-appropriate communication about COVID-19 and what to expect when students return to school should be provided to children, youth and parents/caregivers in advance of school reopening.

- Parents/caregivers will be a major source of comfort and reassurance to their children.
- It will be important for schools to keep parents/caregivers informed of what the school is doing to protect their children, including how they are preventing the spread of respiratory infections and what parents can do at home (e.g. reinforce hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, physical distancing, environmental cleaning and increased reassurance).
- Parents/caregivers will be the ones who will make decisions about keeping their children home if they are sick, and as such, open and frequent communication to parents will be important in ensuring sick children are not sent to school.
- Protocols should consider measures in the following areas, as detailed further in this document.

Modifying behaviours that reduce the spread

Staying home when appropriate

Refer to the Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms \(PDF\)](https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf) (http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf).

- In order to prevent the spread of infection, students and staff who have signs/symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend school and should go to their primary care provider or an assessment centre for testing.
- Direction will be provided by the local public health unit to those who have had an exposure to a confirmed case of COVID-19 or who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 on when they may return to school.

Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

Refer to Public Health Ontario's [How to Wash Your Hands \(PDF\)](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/factsheet-COVID-19-hand-hygiene.pdf?la=en) (<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/factsheet-COVID-19-hand-hygiene.pdf?la=en>) fact sheet.

Refer to Health Canada's [Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(COVID-19\): List of hand sanitizers authorized by Health Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/COVID-19/hand-sanitizer.html) (<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/COVID-19/hand-sanitizer.html>), including which sanitizers may be appropriate for different groups of staff and students.

- Hand hygiene refers to hand washing or hand sanitizing to remove or kill the virus and is the most effective way to reduce the transmission of organisms.
- Respiratory etiquette aims to reduce the risk of transmitting droplets that may contain the virus directly onto other surfaces where they may be picked up by others.
- Education: Staff and students should be provided with targeted, age-appropriate education in proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Local public health units can provide additional guidance. Age-appropriate posters or signage should be placed around the school.
- Supplies: Staff and students should have the supplies they need to conduct appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette and these supplies should be easily accessible.
- **Alcohol Based Hand Rub (ABHR)** with a minimum 60% alcohol concentration (60-90% recommended in community settings) throughout the school (including ideally at the entry point to each classroom) and/or **plain liquid soap** in dispensers, sinks and paper towels in dispensers.
 - Soap and water are preferred as it is the most effective method and least likely to cause harm if accidentally ingested
 - **ABHR** can be used by children. It is most effective when hands are not visibly soiled
 - For any dirt, blood, body fluids (urine/feces), it is preferred that hands be washed with soap and water to remove this "organic material"
 - Safe placement of the **ABHR** to avoid consumption is important, especially for young children
- **Tissues and lined, no-touch waste baskets** (i.e., foot pedal-operated, hand sensor, open basket).
- **Support or modifications** allowing students with special needs to regularly perform hand hygiene as independently as possible.
- Hand hygiene should be conducted by anyone entering the school and incorporated into the daily schedule at regular intervals during the day, above and beyond what is usually recommended (e.g., before eating food, after using the washroom).
- Possible options would be to have regular scheduled hand hygiene breaks based on a pre-specified schedule
- Students may need assistance or supervision

Personal protective equipment (PPE) and source control

In addition to usual vendors that school boards may use, including those through the Ontario Education Collaborative Marketplace, the Ontario Together Portal has a [Workplace PPE Supplier Directory](https://covid-19.ontario.ca/workplace-ppe-supplier-directory#no-back) (<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/workplace-ppe-supplier-directory#no-back>) that lists Ontario businesses that provide personal protective equipment.

Refer to Public Health Ontario resources, including related to [non-medical masks/face coverings \(PDF\)](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/covid-19/pub/2020/05/factsheet-covid-19-non-medical-masks.pdf?la=en) (<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/covid-19/pub/2020/05/factsheet-covid-19-non-medical-masks.pdf?la=en>) and [instructions on putting on and taking off of PPE \(PDF\)](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/covid-19/ipac/2020/04/ipac-ppe-recommended-steps.pdf?la=en) (<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/covid-19/ipac/2020/04/ipac-ppe-recommended-steps.pdf?la=en>).

- In school settings, the expectation is that staff and students do not come into the school if they are unwell. Close, prolonged contact with others can be avoided if other strategies, such as physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and cleaning are implemented and adhered to.

In keeping with public health advice, the school restart plan and adapted delivery models have been designed to allow for physical distancing and cohorting to the best extent possible. As such, in a classroom where a teacher is able to remain in the front of a class, and maintain 2 meters of distance, PPE is not required.

- In the school setting, there are groups of employees whose regular job duties mean physical distancing is not possible (e.g. Education Assistants who work with special needs students in close proximity to perform their regular job duties, etc.). In such cases it is expected that PPE will be provided. This may include, for example, a procedural/surgical grade mask and eye protection in the form of goggles or a face shield. If necessary, for example in situations where direct contact is required with a student for positioning and assistance with eating or toileting, gloves will also be provided.
- Employees in school and office settings, in custodial and maintenance roles should maintain physical distancing. In performing job duties where physical distancing is not possible (for example, work on boilers that require 2 people in close physical proximity around the boiler, etc.), PPE should be provided
- Teachers and other workers may choose to wear non-medical masks on a voluntary basis. If workers choose to wear non-medical masks, they must be reminded that this is not an appropriate substitute for physical distancing in the workplace.
- Workers that wear PPE for protection against workplace hazards besides COVID-19 must continue to use that PPE as required. This includes gloves for new cleaning and disinfecting products that workers use because of COVID-19.
- Workers must be trained on the care, use and limitations of any PPE that they use.
- Recommendations for specific situations in school settings:
 - When physical distancing of at least 2 metres cannot be maintained between staff and other staff or students: PPE consisting of procedure/surgical mask and eye protection (such as goggles or face shield), e.g., during the course of work of Educational Assistants or specialized staff supporting students with special needs.
 - When there is potential contact with bodily fluids: disposable gloves, e.g., during the course of work of custodial and caretaker staff.
 - When cleaning (where no potential contact with bodily fluids): disposable gloves, during the course of work of custodial and caretaker staff, if required.
- A 'kit' should be available in case a student, staff or essential visitor becomes ill while at the school for use by the ill individual and staff member attending to them and should contain alcohol-based hand rub, disposable gloves, surgical/procedural masks, eye protection, and a gown. Instructions on proper use of PPE should be available on the outside of the kit.
- Face coverings (non-medical masks):
 - May not be tolerated by everyone based on underlying health behaviour issues or beliefs. Consideration should be given to mitigating any possible physical or psychological injuries that may inadvertently be caused by wearing a face covering (e.g., interfering with the ability to see or speak clearly).
 - Are not recommended for children, particularly those under the age of two.
 - Should be changed if visibly soiled, damp or damaged.
 - If worn or disposed of incorrectly, could lead to increased risk of infection.
- It is recognized that parents may choose to send a cloth mask to school for their children to wear. In such cases, parents would be responsible for the safe use/compliance during the school day and ensuring cleanliness of the mask.
- Staff and essential visitors may also choose to wear a mask and would be responsible for safe use and cleanliness of the mask and proper disposal.

Maintaining healthy environments

Environmental cleaning

Refer to Public Health Ontario's [Environmental Cleaning fact sheet \(PDF\)](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-COVID-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf) (<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-COVID-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf>).

Refer to Health Canada's [Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(COVID-19\)](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/COVID-19.html) (<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/COVID-19.html>) for approved products.

- **Cleaning products:** Products that provide both the cleaning and disinfection action are preferable due to ease of use (e.g., hydrogen peroxide products). Only use cleaning and disinfectant products that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). These should be used according to the manufacturer's instructions
- **Cleaning program:** School boards should develop a program for cleaning and disinfection of schools, including reviews of:
 - Existing practices to determine where enhancements might be made, including frequency and timing of cleaning and disinfection, areas to clean and/or disinfect, choice of cleaning products, child safety, staffing, signage, and PPE for cleaning staff
 - Inventory to determine items to be stored, moved, or removed altogether to reduce handling or the challenges associated with cleaning them (e.g., porous or soft items such as stuffed toys, area rugs, fabric upholstered seating)
- **High touch surfaces:** Cleaning plus disinfection twice daily is suggested at a minimum, however, more frequent cleaning and disinfection may be necessary, depending on use and soiling

- Includes washrooms (e.g. toilet fixtures, faucets), eating areas (e.g. tables, sinks, countertops), doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, touch screens, push buttons, handrails, computers, photocopiers, sports equipment
- **Outdoor surfaces:** While surfaces on playgrounds need routine cleaning with soap and water but not disinfectant, including high touch surfaces made of plastic or metal, cleaning of wooden surfaces is not recommended
- **Shared objects:** Use of shared objects (e.g., gym or physical education equipment, art supplies, toys, games) should be limited when possible, or the objects should be cleaned between each use
- **Where an individual is suspected of having COVID-19 at school:**
 - Establish a protocol for identification and communication of suspected/confirmed cases to administration and relevant staff to determine contaminated areas and carry out cleaning and disinfection, including timing, return to use, methods, PPE, waste disposal
 - Identify areas that may require cleaning plus disinfection (items used by the individual and all surfaces within 2 metres of the ill person) versus cleaning alone (such as a hallway or room where the individual has passed through)
 - Use disposable cleaning equipment, such as disposable wipes, where possible
 - Remove all items that cannot be cleaned (paper, books, etc.) and store them in a sealed container for a minimum of 7 days

Cohorting

- The purpose of cohorting is to limit the mixing of students, so that if a child or employee develops infection, the number of exposures would be reduced.
- Classes must be cohorted, particularly for the younger age groups, so that students stay with the same class group and there is limited to no mixing between classes and years. This model recognizes that for younger children, close interaction, such as playing and socializing, is central to child development.
- While close contact may be unavoidable between members of a cohort, general infection prevention and control practices, and, for older students, physical distancing, should still be maintained where possible.
- Where possible, the same teacher should remain with the class, or if different teachers are required, having staff come to the classroom so students do not have to change rooms
- The use of supplies and equipment should be limited to one cohort at a time, and the supplies and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected between use.
- Cohorts that utilize a room/space that is shared by cohorts or has other user groups must ensure the room/space is cleaned and disinfected before and after using the space. Consider posting a cleaning log to track cleaning.
- In shared outdoor spaces, 2 metres should be maintained between cohorts and any other individuals outside of the cohort.
- Play structures can only be used by one cohort at a time and must be cleaned and disinfected before and after used by each cohort.
- Plans should be made to prevent mixing of cohorts in washrooms/changerooms and to frequently clean and disinfect shared surfaces in washrooms/ changerooms.

Physical distancing

- Encourage physical distancing of at least 2 metres between students, cohorts, staff and essential visitors. Re-orienting the school physical environment to support physical distancing may reduce the reliance on individual-level behavioural measures that may be impractical, particularly for younger students.
- Outside of cohort arrangements, younger children and children with special needs will have a harder time following advice for physical distancing and may require other strategies (e.g. smaller class sizes for younger children). Information should be presented to students in an age- and developmentally appropriate way.
- **Classrooms**
 - When children are in the classroom, to the greatest extent possible, efforts should be made to arrange the classroom furniture to leave as much space as possible between students.
 - Smaller class sizes, if feasible, will aid in physical distancing.
 - If weather permits, consideration could be given to having classes outside.
- **Adjustments to movement throughout the school**
 - Create designated routes for students to get to and from classrooms, including different and separate entrance points for students in different grades.
 - Provide visual cues/physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs/posters on walls, to guide appropriate distances in lines/queues and at other times (e.g., guides for creating “one-way routes” in hallways).
 - Stagger periods of student movement around the school and discourage students congregating in the hallways.
- **Drop-off/pick-up**
 - Develop procedures that support physical distancing and separate cohorts as best as possible, e.g., staggering times, using signage/markings on the ground to direct students through the entry/exit steps.
 - Pick-up and drop-off of students should happen outside the school unless it is determined that there is a need for the parent/guardian to enter the setting.
 - Parents should be educated on the role they play in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 through physical distancing at school - they should be provided with guidance on drop-off and pick-up procedures to discourage congregating at school entrances.
 - Personal belongings brought to school should be minimized. If brought to school, personal items, e.g. backpack, clothing, sun protection, water bottles, food, etc., should be labeled and stored separately, in cubbies/designated areas or lockers.
- **Shared spaces**

- Close communal use spaces such as cafeterias, if possible or stagger their use, ensuring physical distancing, and clean and disinfect between use.
- **Staff to staff contact**
 - Assign staff to dedicated work areas as much as possible, discourage staff from sharing phones, desks, offices and other tools and equipment.
 - Consider alternative approaches, such as a virtual staff room.
- **Large gatherings/assemblies**
 - Large gatherings/assemblies should be cancelled for the immediate future.
 - Choir practices and band practices pose a higher level of risk and special consideration should be given to how they are held, the room ventilation and the distance between performers. Instruments should not be shared between students.
- **Outdoor activities**
 - During outdoor activities such as recess, physical distancing should not be required.
 - Children should perform hand hygiene prior to outdoor play / playground use. There should be a low threshold to close the play structures if there are cases in the school.
 - Sports and physical education classes should be encouraged and continue, according to available protocols. There should be special consideration as to whether restarting sports with a high degree of physical contact (i.e. rugby, football and wrestling) should be postponed or modified for the present time.
- **Lunch breaks**
 - To the greatest extent possible, students are encouraged to eat lunch in their classroom with their cohort to ensure chances of contact and transmission are minimized.
 - Stagger break and lunch times to allow students to wash hands before eating, without creating congestion in washrooms or handwashing stations.
 - If weather permits, consideration could be given to having lunch breaks outside.
- **With respect to eating and drinking at school:**
 - Ensure students and staff perform proper hand hygiene before and after eating.
 - Ensure each student has their own drink bottle that is labeled, kept with them during the day and not shared.
 - Fill water bottles rather than drinking directly from the mouthpiece of water fountains.
 - Ensure each student has their own individual meal or snack with no common food items.
 - Remove self-serving food items.
 - Clean multi-use utensils after each use.
 - Reinforce ‘no food sharing’ policies.
 - Do not plan activities that involve students in preparing or serving of food.
 - Ensure physical distancing is maintained while students are eating.
- Third party food services, including nutrition programs, must be delivered in a way that any student who wishes to participate can do so. “Grab and Go format” is preferred. All surfaces, bins and containers for food must be disinfected prior to and after each use.
- **Prohibiting non-essential visitors**
 - Limit parents, volunteers for classrooms, guests and others inside the school.
 - Use of video and telephone should be used to interact with families, where possible, rather than in person.
- **Physical infrastructure**
- It is expected that environmental conditions and airflow influence the transmissibility of COVID-19.
- Adequately ventilated classroom environments are expected to be associated with less likelihood of transmission compared with poorly ventilated settings
 - Avoid recirculation of air, as far as practically possible and ensure clean filters.
 - In general, ventilating indoor environments with fresh air, whether by increasing the outdoor air ratio of the HVAC system settings as much as possible or by opening windows, and avoiding or reducing recirculation, will dilute the air exhaled by the occupants including any infectious particles. Even if this is not feasible for the whole facility, consider for higher risk areas, e.g., where crowding may be an issue.
 - Recommended maintenance measures for air handling systems (including inspection and replacement of filters, if applicable) are essential to follow.
- There may be instances of bladed and bladeless fan and portable air conditioner use in schools which also generate air currents that could affect respiratory droplets
 - Minimizing their use as much as possible (e.g., lowest setting), and making adjustments to direct the airflow upwards, away from surfaces and occupants may help gradually mix exhaled respiratory droplets while minimizing turbulence.
 - These devices also require regular maintenance, e.g., surface cleaning including the blades; following manufacturer’s directions for maintenance and removing any moisture or water collected from the portable air conditioners.
- Do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety or health risk, e.g., risk of falling, triggering asthma symptoms, risk of bees/wasps, to students and staff and ensure that COVID-19 measures do not introduce new occupational hazards to the setting, e.g., do not prop open fire doors to increase ventilation/reduce exposure to frequently touched door handles.

Maintaining healthy operations

Risk mitigation for students at higher risk of infection

- Some children may be at higher risk of adverse outcome from COVID-19 infections due to underlying medical conditions such as immunocompromised states or chronic medical conditions such as cardiac and lung disorders.

- Children with underlying conditions may attend school as they would per usual. However, it is important for parents to work with their child's healthcare providers so that an informed decision can be made in this regard. This is particularly relevant for children with newly diagnosed illnesses requiring the first-time use of new or augmented immunosuppression.
- In the event that such children have a documented exposure to the virus, it is recommended that their care providers be contacted for further management.

Protection of staff and at-risk persons or families

- Risk mitigation for teachers and other staff should be similar to those recommended for other public settings, as restrictions are eased and taken into account the appropriate institutional guidance relating to at-risk staff.
- Physical distancing of school staff from children and other staff should be emphasized.
- In general, masks should not be required for school staff if physical distancing is practiced appropriately. If close contact with others cannot be avoided the option of using a mask may be reasonable. However, if used in the classroom, the teacher should explain the rationale to the children.
- Public health guidance should be followed to mitigate risks in situations where children and at-risk siblings or older adults reside within the same home.

Screening/self-assessment

Refer to the [COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms \(PDF\)](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf) (http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf) on Ontario's [COVID-19 website](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx) (http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx)

- It is essential that strict exclusion policies are in place for symptomatic students and staff
 - Staff and students should be educated not to come to school if they are symptomatic or ill or if someone they have come in close contact with, including within their household, is ill with suspected or positive COVID-19 in the past 14 days.
 - School boards should consider developing protocols for supporting ongoing learning for students who may be required to remain home for a period, through online or other means.
- Student screening: Parents/caregivers should be provided a checklist to perform daily screening of their children before arriving at school.
- Staff screening: Self-assessment tools should be made available to staff to ensure awareness of possible symptoms of COVID-19. Staff who suspect they may have symptoms should stay home and seek testing.
- Signs should be posted at entrances to the school to remind students, staff, parents/caregivers, and essential visitors with information on protocols.
- Teachers and other staff members should be provided with information on signs and symptoms of COVID-19 in children so that appropriate action can be taken if children develop symptoms during the day. Students, in particular, should be monitored for atypical symptoms and signs of COVID-19. Due to the wide range of symptoms for COVID-19 and evolving understanding of the disease, a low threshold for symptoms is advised.
- Teach children/youth in age-appropriate and non-stigmatizing language how to identify symptoms of COVID-19 and instruct them to speak to a staff member immediately if they are experiencing symptoms.
- Schools must keep daily records of anyone (e.g. students, parents/caregivers, staff and essential visitors) entering the school setting.
 - Records (e.g., name, contact information, time of arrival/departure, screening completion, etc.) must be kept up to date and available to facilitate contact tracing in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case or outbreak.

Management of individuals with suspected COVID-19, cases and outbreaks

Refer to the [COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms \(PDF\)](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf) (http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf) on Ontario's [COVID-19 website](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx) (http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx) as well as [Local public health units](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx) (<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx>).

- Case and contact management are part of a broader plan to limit exposure to COVID-19 in schools.
- A "close contact" is a person with close, prolonged contact with a probable or confirmed case while the individual was ill.
- Records (e.g., name, contact information, time of arrival/departure, etc.) must be kept up to date and available to facilitate contact tracing.
- School principals are mandated to report infectious diseases under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*. Principals inform local public health units (PHUs) and PHUs recommend closure, provide notices, or make other recommendations, e.g., additional testing, self-isolation, cleaning advice.

Suspected cases

- Schools must have protocols in place:
 - With the local PHU around steps to take where COVID-19 is suspected, e.g., identifying close contacts.

- To notify parents/caregivers if their child begins to show symptoms of COVID-19 while at school, including the need for immediate pick-up and an area to isolate the student until pick-up.
- If a student begins to experience symptoms of COVID-19 while attending school, it is recommended that they be immediately separated from others in a separate room until they can be picked up. In addition, where possible, anyone who is providing care to the individual should maintain a distance of at least 2 metres.
- If a staff member develops COVID-19 symptoms, they should return home and self-isolate immediately. If they cannot leave immediately, the staff member should be isolated in a specific place until they are able to leave.
- A ‘kit’ should be available in case a student, staff or essential visitor becomes ill while at the school for use by the ill individual and staff member attending to them; the kit should contain alcohol-based hand rub, gloves, surgical/procedural masks, eye protection, and a gown. Instructions on proper use of PPE should be available on the outside of the kit.
- Tissues should be provided to the individual to support proper respiratory etiquette, along with guidance on proper disposal of the tissues.
- Environmental cleaning/disinfection is required of the space and items used by the individual.

Testing

- Schools should follow current provincial testing guidance.
- The local PHU will provide guidance on steps to take where an individual tests positive for COVID-19.
- If the staff member’s illness is determined to be work-related, in accordance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) and its regulations, the employer must provide a written notice within four days of being advised that a staff member has an occupational illness, including an occupationally-acquired infection, or if a claim has been made to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) by or on behalf of the staff member with respect to an occupational illness, including an occupational infection to the:
 - Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development;
 - Joint health and safety committee (or health and safety representative); and
 - Trade union, if any.

Contact tracing

- When a positive case is identified, PHUs conduct contact identification and follow-up with identified contacts. PHUs will require support from the school, e.g., student attendance records, contact information.
- Schools must keep daily records of anyone (e.g. students, parents/caregivers, staff and essential visitors) entering the school setting.
- Records (e.g., name, contact information, time of arrival/departure, screening completion, etc.) must be kept up to date and available to facilitate contact tracing in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case or outbreak.
- Contacts are informed that they have been exposed and are provided with public health guidance. Contact tracing should occur within the first 48 hours of a new positive case.
- To support successful case and contact management, schools should:
 - Keep up-to-date contact lists, including support staff and essential visitors
 - Educate parents around contact tracing strategies
 - Develop rapid response capability.

Outbreak considerations for schools

- Additional guidance to be provided.
- Principles:
 - Rapid response based on well understood roles and responsibilities and defined processes across ministries, local school boards and schools, local public health and other key stakeholders.
 - A consistent provincial policy approach, with variability as appropriate.
 - Proactive approach to case and outbreak management, with low thresholds for action.
 - Early identification of cases to local public health enabled by surveillance activities.
- A scaled, adaptable and measured approach to outbreak interventions.
 - Consideration of case numbers, confidence in cohorting implementation, number of cohorts impacted, local epidemiology and consideration of the needs of vulnerable student populations.
 - Closures and/or cohort quarantining to allow for case and contact management and investigations, environmental cleaning and/ or to interrupt transmission.
- Consistent and coordinated communication to all stakeholders.

Appendix 2

Student transportation guidance

In this guidance document, examples are provided while recognizing that responses to COVID-19 will not be a “one size fits all” model – each school board and consortia will need to take different factors and local circumstances into account and work with their local public health units and school bus operators in considering and developing their own approaches.

This guidance document recognizes that not all recommendations may be feasible or appropriate in every circumstance. Rather, it is intended to set forward best practices and tips that should be considered where feasible and appropriate.

On May 29, 2020, Transport Canada released [general federal guidance \(https://www.tc.gc.ca/en/services/road/federal-guidance-school-bus-operations-during-COVID-19-pandemic.html\)](https://www.tc.gc.ca/en/services/road/federal-guidance-school-bus-operations-during-COVID-19-pandemic.html) for student transportation, which includes guidance for bus trips, enhanced cleaning protocols, shields and enclosure systems. The ministry encourages school boards, together with their consortia, to consider the following:

Self-assessment

- School bus drivers, monitors, and aides should not report to work if they have symptoms associated with COVID-19 or they think they have been exposed to COVID-19. They should visit [Ontario's COVID-19 website \(https://covid-19.ontario.ca/\)](https://covid-19.ontario.ca/) to determine if they need a test and where to find an assessment centre.
- Students who have symptoms associated with COVID-19 or think they have been exposed to COVID-19 should not be taking student transportation and should stay home. They should visit [Ontario's COVID-19 website \(https://covid-19.ontario.ca/\)](https://covid-19.ontario.ca/) to determine if they need a test and to find an assessment centre.
- If a student develops symptoms while at school, they should not take the school bus home and should be picked up by a parent/guardian or caregiver.

Alternative transportation

- Parents/guardians and caregivers are encouraged to use active forms of travel or private transportation, where possible, to ease pressure on transportation demand.
- School boards may encourage other modes of travel to school, such as active school travel, by ensuring appropriate infrastructure is in place.
- Where student transportation is not provided (either by parent choice or capacity constraints), school boards must inform parents and share what alternatives might be available.
- Consider pick-up and drop-off times for private transportation to avoid congestion around schools (e.g., segment by grade(s), cohort).

Physical distancing

- Students, parents and caregivers should, where possible, maintain a minimum of 2 metres (6 feet) of distancing between people when waiting at school bus stops.
- Maintain physical distancing between students on school vehicles by reducing vehicle capacity. Consider planning parameters of one student per seat and having students of the same classroom cohort sit in the same area where feasible.
- Students of the same household may be permitted to share seats.
- Physical and visual cues may be used on school vehicles to reinforce health and safety measures (e.g., seat markers on bus to indicate how students may safely observe physical distancing).
- Physical distancing may be maintained during loading and unloading through specific measures (e.g., seating arrangement fills bus back-to-front or front-to-back to reduce student interaction).

Cleaning and hygiene

- Develop cleaning protocols including the required cleaning equipment, surfaces to be cleaned, and frequency. School boards should reference guidelines from Health Canada and [Public Health Ontario \(PDF\) \(https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en\)](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en) when developing these protocols.
- Frequently touched surfaces (e.g., handrails, seats, seat belts, floors, windows, steering wheel) should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice per day.
- Consider making alcohol-based hand sanitizer available on vehicles.
- Consider ventilation and air circulation in all school vehicles.

Personal protective equipment and face coverings

- Assess whether the use of personal protective equipment (e.g., surgical/procedure mask and eye protection (face shield or goggles)) for school bus drivers, school bus monitors and student aides is necessary if they are unable to maintain physical distancing and separation when transporting students. (See additional [guidance provided by Transport Canada \(https://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/motorvehiclesafety/personal-protective-equipment-uses-commercial-vehicle-drivers.html\)](https://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/motorvehiclesafety/personal-protective-equipment-uses-commercial-vehicle-drivers.html) for personal protective equipment)
- Where physical distancing is not possible, consider the use of non-medical face coverings or masks for students.
- Any physical barrier or modification should be compliant with all applicable federal and provincial legislation and not interfere with or affect the safe operation of the vehicle. (See [federal guidance document \(https://www.tc.gc.ca/en/services/road/joint-guidance-document-transport-canada-csa-d250-school-bus-technical-committee.html\)](https://www.tc.gc.ca/en/services/road/joint-guidance-document-transport-canada-csa-d250-school-bus-technical-committee.html).)

Additional considerations

- School boards and consortia may consider surveying parent intentions to assess transportation service needs (e.g., through a transportation opt-in process).
- School boards and consortia may consider reviewing transportation eligibility policies (e.g., walk distances, courtesy riders) to focus available transportation capacity on students who would be unable to reach school without it.
- For regions in which public transportation is a mode of transportation for eligible students, school boards may provide guidelines for how students may safely use public transportation (e.g., face coverings, physical distancing). School boards and consortia are encouraged to consider the [Ministry of Transportation's guidance on public transit](#) as well as guidance from their local public transit agency.
- Accommodations for immunocompromised and otherwise medically vulnerable students, and students with special transportation needs (e.g., arrange separate vehicle, assign seating at front of school bus).
- School boards and consortia may consider reviewing planning parameters such as limiting transfers and the number of students at a bus stop, to reduce exposure.
- School bus drivers, school bus monitors, and student aides should receive appropriate training to ensure that introduced health and safety measures are understood, followed and enforced.
- Health and safety measures should be clearly communicated to parents and guardians of students to ensure their comfort with the adapted transportation system and receive their support in having students understand and follow guidelines.
- School boards and consortia should develop communication protocols to report suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 of school bus drivers, monitors, aides and transported students to their local public health unit.

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