

February 4, 2021

Announcing Updates to the Provincial Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 School Settings

Dear Families,

Today, the BC Ministry of Education announced some updates to the [Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 School Settings](#). The purpose of this letter is to give you a high-level overview of the changes. We encourage you to view the government's [news release](#) or visit the [BC Centre of Disease Control's website](#) for more detailed information. We will be implementing these updates in our schools effective immediately.

Masks in Schools

Non-medical masks are now required for all staff in all K-12 schools, and all students in our secondary schools in all indoor areas, including when they are in their learning groups. The only exceptions are when:

- They are sitting or standing at their seat or workstation in a classroom
- They are eating or drinking
- There is a barrier in place

Mask exemptions remain in place for students and staff who cannot wear a mask for health or behavioural reasons.

The updated guidelines reiterate that masks are not a replacement for physical distancing.

Even when wearing a mask, staff and students will still be required to maintain physical distance from people outside of their learning group.

Elementary school students are not required to wear masks and it remains a family decision. *(Please note: This is a change as previously the guidelines stated that masks were 'not recommended' for elementary school students.)*

Physical Education and Music

Effective immediately:

- High-intensity physical activities need to maximize physical distancing, reduce physical contact and be held outdoors as much as possible.
- Students playing instruments should be spaced at least two metres apart.
- Masks are to be used when singing.
- Shared equipment like musical instruments or items like weight machines and treadmills can be used only if they are cleaned between use, according to the school's strict sanitization guidelines.
- Extracurricular activities including sports, arts and special interest clubs can only occur if physical distance can be maintained between members of different learning groups and reduced physical contact is practiced by those within the same learning group.

Consistent Implementation of the Recommended Measures

Experience to date has shown that schools continue to be low-risk sites for COVID-19 transmission. Most school exposures in the Fall did not result in transmission within the school, however, some school exposures did result in additional cases. The Ministry has recommended that all schools review their health and safety plans, with a focus on areas where measures may be absent or inconsistently implemented.

The District and all of our schools will be updating their safety plans and using the government's [School Health and Safety Checklist Tool](#) to ensure consistent implementation of recommended measures.

Although evidence indicates that the health and safety guidelines for K-12 schools have been working well, today's announcement and required updates reflect recent learnings and will help to strengthen these measures further.

Health Check App

As you know, one of the best ways to keep COVID-19 out of our schools is for students and staff to stay home if they are not feeling well. All students and staff are required to complete a [daily health check](#) before coming to school.

The Ministry today released the [K-12 Health Checker app](#) as an additional way for students, parents and caregivers to check their child for COVID-19 symptoms.

Federal Funding

Today's announcement shared that the second instalment of federal funding arrived on January 29, 2021. The Ministry of Education will be allocating \$101.1 million to school districts. More information on how this will be spent will follow in due course.

In closing, we encourage you to continue to follow public health recommendations to help keep the number of cases in our communities low. This is the single most important thing for keeping our schools safe.

We know there is a lot of information contained in this letter and we thank you for taking the time to read it. We encourage you to contact your school principal if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Doug Sheppard
Superintendent of Schools