

RESTORING SAFE SCHOOLS



Public Health Measures for K to 12 Schools

Last Updated: January 14, 2022

The health and safety of students, teachers, and all school staff remains the number one priority. The K to 12 education system continues to demonstrate commitment and dedication to implementing measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and support in-class learning.

Effective January 17, 2022, schools are opening in the [Restricted Level \(Orange\)](#) on the Manitoba Pandemic Response System. This means that all students are returning to in-class learning with enhanced prevention measures in place across all Manitoba schools. These actions and measures respond to the recent rise of cases of COVID-19 because of the emergence of the omicron variant.

PREVENTION MEASURES

Staying Home When Sick

- Staff and students continue to follow the fundamentals, such as self-screening, hand hygiene, and staying home when sick. For more information, visit:
[Focus on the Fundamentals](#), [Symptoms of COVID-19](#) and [Self-Screening Tool](#)
- Students must stay home if they develop symptoms of COVID-19 and can only return if they have followed all isolation requirements as applicable and are symptom free for 24 hours.
For more information on isolation requirements, visit:
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/fundamentals/self-isolation.html>
- Return to work guidelines for school staff have been developed separately and shared with staff directly.

More physical distancing

- Schools are adjusting space to ensure two metres (six feet) of physical distancing to the greatest extent possible. Schools may use a variety of rooms and spaces to achieve physical distancing.
- Students in K to 6 must remain within cohorts, at all times.

<p>More physical distancing <i>(cont.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congestion in school is being minimized (i.e. staggered start/stop times, or recess/snack, lunch and class transition times). • Gatherings and assemblies will be postponed or shifted to virtual delivery. This includes virtual staff meetings and professional development, even when teachers and staff are working at schools.
<p>High Quality Masks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All school staff are required to wear medical grade masks while indoors. • Students are to wear well-fitting masks with at least three layers (either cloth or disposable). This requirement includes wearing masks in the class, including physical education classes, and while riding the bus. Masks can be provided by schools to students if forgotten/needed. • No matter which type of mask is used, proper fit is key. • Those with mask exemptions who are not able to wear a mask all day continue to be encouraged to wear one as much as possible. • For more information on mask guidance see: www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/ • Nearly 7.3 million masks have already been sent to schools this school year, and an additional five million masks are being provided during this period of high transmission.
<p>Bus Transportation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation continues to be provided and high-touch surfaces on buses will be cleaned frequently (in between trips). • Practices are in place to encourage bus drivers and passengers to practice hand hygiene before and after trips.
<p>Extra measures at schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the risk of COVID-19 transmission from surfaces is low, more frequent cleaning and disinfecting is focused on high-touch areas in schools. Washrooms are an exception and require more intensive cleaning. • Schools are routinely monitoring hand hygiene supplies to ensure an ample supply at all sinks in washroom and kitchen areas, and continue to implement touchless water fountains where available. • Visitors will be limited to those needed for essential purposes. (i.e. teacher candidates, immunizers, lunch program volunteers, other necessary services offered at schools).

Extra measures at schools

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- Meal programs may resume as long as congestion and crowding is avoided.
- K to 6 students are to eat lunch with their own cohort with distancing in place. Masks may be removed where there is physical distancing of two metres (six feet) for the purpose of eating and drinking.
- Use of wind instruments and singing are only permitted if all applicable public health measures are followed and two metres (six feet) of distancing can be maintained.
- Activities outside of school hours will continue to follow applicable public health orders and guidelines.

Extracurricular Activities

- Extracurricular sports tournaments should be paused.
- Overnight camps are prohibited with current public health orders.
- For children in K to 6, activities will not proceed if they involve more than one cohort.
- Spectators should be restricted from attending during this period of high transmission.

Improved Ventilation

- Guidelines about proper ventilation practices and maintenance have been developed and all schools are required to assess and take actions as needed.
- Schools are to ensure ventilations systems are functioning optimally.
- School divisions and schools are prioritizing ventilation improvements where needed.
- Funding of \$6.8 million was allocated to support over 200 short-term operating improvements related to air purification, including air purification filters, units and systems. This is over and above the \$45 million allocated to school divisions for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- School divisions and independent schools have been asked to report on progress on the implementation of provincial guidelines for school ventilation.
- For more information on the ventilation guidance, please visit Ventilation under Schools Operations during COVID-19 at: www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index

Vaccinations

- Increasing access to vaccination continues to be a priority for all students and staff who are eligible.
- School staff are able to get their vaccines, including boosters, at after-school clinics. Many schools also have after hours clinics open to parents, caregivers, school staff and community members.
- There are also many appointments available at physicians' offices, pharmacies and regional immunization clinics.
- Manitoba has required testing for designated unvaccinated school staff. More than 95 per cent of designated school staff have provided proof of vaccination. Unvaccinated staff are required by public health orders to test within 48 hours of working.
- For more information, visit: www.protectmb.ca

Expanded COVID-19 Testing

- School staff and students are eligible for testing at all community test sites if they have signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- If school staff or students test positive on a self-administered rapid antigen test, they are encouraged to report the result to their school and visit a test site for confirmatory PCR testing.
- Rapid antigen tests are being supplied to schools for staff who have COVID-19 symptoms. Fast pass sites also offer rapid antigen tests for school and child care staff.
- A new rapid antigen testing program will be implemented in schools experiencing high case numbers and high rates of absenteeism to support continued in-person learning. Public health officials will be monitoring closely and advising when schools need to move into alert status.
- To date, schools have received more than 500,000 rapid tests for students from Kindergarten to Grade 6. An additional 200,000 rapid tests are in process of being sent out to school divisions and schools.
- For more information on testing in general, visit: www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/rapid-testing

Cases in Schools

The emergence of the omicron variant has changed how COVID-19 is circulating in the community.

COVID-19 is no longer an emerging illness. The virus is circulating very broadly in the community. With the new characteristics of the virus (high transmission, short incubation periods, and a high incidence of asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic cases that will go undetected), managing cases and contacts at the individual level is ineffective.

While schools will no longer provide close contact notifications on individual cases, public health officials will continue to monitor cases in schools and work with schools to issue notification letters, implement a rapid antigen testing program or implement remote learning, if needed.

CASES IN SCHOOLS

Case Management and Notification

- School officials will regularly communicate/report to school communities on attendance patterns and the prevalence of cases within their school.
- The K-12 Schools Dashboard continues to report on confirmed staff and student cases. For more information, visit: [COVID-19 Dashboard: School-Aged Cases and School Staff Cases in Manitoba](#).
- Public health officials will monitor cases in schools and investigate when there is increased case activity linked to their staff and students. Schools will also monitor staff and student absenteeism rates and self-reported COVID-19 cases. Schools will escalate concerns to public health officials.
- If increased COVID-19 activity is suspected, public health officials will direct the school to send a school notification letter to recommend self-monitoring of symptoms, and to avoid non-essential contact outside of school, especially with individuals at risk of severe disease. An alert status will be added to the COVID-19 dashboard when the school community is notified.
- When COVID-19 cases and respiratory disease activity increases in a school, public health officials may recommend the implementation of a period of rapid antigen testing or other preventive measures in school, such as postponing extracurricular activities.

Case Management and Notification

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- Where transmission continues to increase or where COVID-19 cases are affecting school operations, up to one-week of remote learning for the class/cohort or school may be recommended by public health officials. If a longer period is required, public health officials will reassess. Remote learning status will be noted on the COVID-19 dashboard. School officials will continue to inform families of classroom, cohort and entire school shifts to remote learning.
 - For more information on case management and notification, please visit: Health Concerns and COVID-19 Case Management at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid
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