

Healthy and Safe Schools

2021-22 Guidelines for COVID-19 and
other Infectious Diseases



Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

This document will be adjusted as necessary to reflect the latest public health information. Please refer to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's website for the most recent document.

This is a living document intended to inform the school community on the healthy and safe return to school. As new information becomes available, the directives will be re-evaluated and adapted throughout the school year accordingly.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM 2020-21

Last year the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in consultation with Public Health, released directives to school districts and schools to provide for a safe return to school for students and school personnel. Our plans, along with the cooperation of school personnel, students and parents, allowed our students to learn throughout the year with minimal disruptions to learning, limited cases in schools and very few in-school transmissions.

The 2020-21 school year saw fewer common colds, stomach flus and other communicable diseases. Based on the valuable lessons and experience gained over the past year, the school system will continue to operate with some health measures to protect younger students, vulnerable students and school personnel and those who are not able to get vaccinated due to medical conditions.

While New Brunswick benefits from having relatively high vaccination rates, COVID-19 is not going to disappear entirely. Variants continue to emerge across the world and new research becomes increasingly available. The province and our schools will continue to see COVID-19 cases throughout the upcoming school year. This is why we will continue to implement layers of protection and everyone should continue to follow protective health measures to help limit the spread of COVID-19 and minimize disruptions to learning through the coming year. By continuing to follow best practices and protective health measures as we transition to living with COVID-19, we can support students in a more normal day-to-day life, so they enjoy their childhood to the fullest.

VACCINATION

COVID-19 vaccines are effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, long-haul COVID, and death. Based on what we know about the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines, having a high number of people vaccinated within a population provides both individual and community protection. This will reduce the overall number of people who test positive for COVID-19. However, it is expected that there will still be some people who test positive and experience milder symptoms, even if they are fully immunized.

As COVID-19 vaccines are not yet approved for children under the age of 12, we will need the help of individuals, communities and businesses to help keep schools healthy and safe for students. That's why we strongly encourage students 12 and older and school personnel to be vaccinated.

Last spring, we worked with Public Health to create opportunities for eligible students and school staff to be vaccinated. We will continue to collaborate with partners across government to increase access to vaccines across the education system throughout the coming year, particularly once a vaccine becomes available for individuals 12 and under. This will be done by organizing clinics or facilitating transportation to clinics.

School and school district, as government employees, will be required to get vaccinated or undergo regular testing, and wear a mask at all times when at school.

There will still be individuals who are not fully vaccinated within the school system, whether due to eligibility, medical concerns or other reasons. That's why it is important that we continue to use various layers of protection every day, or when there are increased case numbers within a community. Schools will continue to encourage and model kindness, respect and patience throughout the coming school year.

GENERAL HEALTH GUIDELINES

Symptoms

Everyone in the school community has an important role to play in fostering a healthy school environment. Students and school personnel who have two or more symptoms or who are feeling sick, stay home. If students or school personnel have two (2) or more symptoms, they will get tested. Students and school personnel with one symptom will wear a mask at school.

Students or school personnel who have been identified by their primary care provider as having asthma, seasonal allergies or who suffer from chronic runny nose/nasal congestion are not required to be excluded based on these symptoms. Schools will not request proof of a negative test result or a doctor's note before the student or staff member returns to school.

Symptoms have included:

- Fever
- A new cough, or worsening chronic cough
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Headache
- A new onset of fatigue
- Diarrhea
- Loss of sense of taste
- Loss of sense of smell
- In children, purple markings on the fingers and toes
- Difficulty breathing

Symptomatic Students and/or School Personnel

- The school must have an area designated to isolate school personnel or students who become symptomatic during the day while waiting to be picked up. Pick-up is to occur within an hour of notification. Parents must be aware that this is an expectation.
- Individuals with two or more symptoms must be immediately separated from others in a supervised area until they can go home. Where possible, anyone providing care to a symptomatic student should maintain a distance of two metres and wear a mask.
- If two-metre physical distancing cannot be maintained from the symptomatic student and if circumstances allow, the student must wear a community mask and be separated from other students and school personnel until their parent arrives to pick them up.
- Symptomatic school personnel must immediately isolate from others and wear a community mask until they are able to leave the building.
- Hygiene and respiratory etiquette must be practiced while the symptomatic student/school personnel is waiting to be picked up.

Hand washing

Good hand washing practices help reduce the spread of germs. This helped prevent students and teachers from getting sick by reducing the spread of illnesses such as COVID-19, the common cold and stomach flus. School personnel will encourage appropriate hand hygiene practices before, during, after outdoor play, before and after meals, after using the toilet. Signs will be posted throughout the school to remind everyone to properly wash and sanitize their hands.

Students and school personnel will be required to clean their hands with hand sanitizer before entering the classroom. School personnel will monitor younger students to ensure that they are washing their hands correctly.

Masking

Masks have been an important layer of protection in reducing the spread of COVID-19 as well as other respiratory illnesses. Students and school personnel in schools welcoming Kindergarten to Grade 8 students will be required to wear masks in common indoor areas. Students and school personnel in grades 9 to 12 will be required to wear masks in common indoor areas until individuals aged 12 to 19 in their health zone reach 90 per cent fully vaccinated. The requirement to wear a mask in common areas, except staff room with no students, applies to school personnel who has been vaccinated.

Schools will promote kindness and respect for everyone.

In the event of an outbreak, Public Health may require students and school staff to wear a mask all day, including in the classroom and outdoors. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 8 will be required to leave a clean mask at school. Schools will have a supply of masks in case of an outbreak situation.

Promote Respiratory Hygiene Practices

Good respiratory hygiene practices include covering the mouth and nose with a tissue or elbow when coughing or sneezing, throwing the tissue into the garbage after use, and immediately washing or sanitizing hands. These practices will continue to be incorporated into classroom curriculum and students will be taught healthy respiratory hygiene practices.

Water Fountains

The use of bubbler (spout) component on water fountains is not permitted. For bottle fillers on fountains, students and school personnel will ensure that their water bottle does not come into contact with the nozzle when refilling their water bottles. Signage will be posted reminding students and staff to properly use the stations when refilling bottles.

Ventilation

Ventilation and air exchange contribute to a healthy school environment. A working group on ventilation systems in schools was established early on in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and included representatives from WorkSafeNB, Public Health, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. As part of a related initiative to ensure good air quality in schools, air quality testing was carried out in schools that did not have integrated or mechanical ventilation systems last spring and the department has launched a pan-provincial, multi-year program to promote optimal learning and working environments with good quality ventilation.

The department is currently working with school districts to promote healthy air circulation within schools. School districts are ensuring ventilation systems are set to provide the maximum fresh air intake recommended for the system. Other means of natural ventilation include, when practical, the use of operable windows and opening doors to promote air circulation.

Fans will not be allowed in schools. If the outdoor temperature including the humidex is 36° Celsius and above, students may be learning from home. This will depend on the ventilation and cooling system in each school. School districts will direct this process.

Learning will shift to home learning with school personnel continuing to report to school and students learning from home. Teachers will be expected to be available online and depending on student age group may be expected to be offering direct instruction and assist students.

School personnel will be allowed the use of fans as long as they are alone in a classroom or office.

Student transportation

School buses will be able to transport students at normal capacity and they will be disinfected daily. Students are encouraged to sit in the same seats and with the same students as much as possible. Students must wash or sanitize their hands before leaving home in the morning. Bus drivers will continue to use curtains installed on buses last year.

All individuals on a bus will be required to wear a mask, except for a bus driver when driving or if the curtains are deployed.

Ensure Adequate Cleaning and Disinfection

Schools will be cleaned and disinfected regularly. Custodians will disinfect daily all frequently touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, handrails, cafeteria tables, etc.

If a community experiences a high rate of transmission of COVID-19, or if there is evidence of any in-school transmission, there will be special focus on disinfecting. For instance, this may require students to sanitize their hands before and after using shared materials or disinfecting the shared material such as gym and physical activity equipment, musical instruments, common use school supplies, and other materials or items used by multiple students.

Disinfecting products will be available in easily accessible, age appropriate areas in classrooms to encourage school personnel and students to self-clean and disinfect, in case there are outbreaks.

HOW WILL THIS YEAR BE DIFFERENT FROM LAST YEAR?

- No classroom **bubbles** for Kindergarten to Grade 8;
- **Regular group sizes** for Kindergarten to Grade 5 classes;
- **Full-time attendance** for high school students;
- **Music** classes will return to regular practices*;
- **Interscholastic** and **Extra-Curricular** and **Intramural** activities will be allowed without restrictions*;
- **Cafeterias and meal programs** will return to normal operations; and
- **School buses** may transport students at full capacity.

** Public Health may impose restrictions on these classes and activities if there is a case in a school or an increased number of cases in a region.*

KINDERGARTEN TO GRADE 8

COVID-19 vaccines have not been approved for children under the age of 12. This means students from Kindergarten to Grade 8 will not be vaccinated before the start of the 2021-22 school year. Keeping our schools healthy and safe as we continue to live with COVID-19 will depend on the help of individuals, businesses and communities.

The directives for Kindergarten to Grade 8 will be re-evaluated regularly, including once students under the age of 12 are eligible for vaccination.

Schools will work at adding extra layers of protection similar to the 2020-21 school year for our younger students, such as:

- Controlling the flow of traffic in hallways to help reduce congestion and prevent exposure to respiratory viruses;
- School administrators will look to group classes in the most feasible method within their normal scheduling, to help limit student interactions and facilitate contact tracing;
- Students and school personnel will wear masks in common indoor areas (classrooms are not considered common indoor areas while learning is ongoing);
- Activities and learning are encouraged to be held outdoors when the weather permits;
- Hand washing as part of the regular school routine;
- Students regularly disinfecting desks and other commonly touched surfaces;
- Assemblies will not be permitted, including concerts and other student gatherings etc., will be organized virtually.
- The use of indoor spaces under the [Community Use of Schools](#) will be limited to youth-based activities and organizations. This directive will be looked at before December and further directions will be communicated;
- Supply staff will wear a mask in common areas (unless eating);
- Other itinerant school personnel as well as visiting professionals will wear a mask inside the school; and
- Visitors will be limited in schools, by appointment only and will wear masks inside the school.

GRADES 9 TO 12 (schools with only students in these grades)

Vaccination rates for children between the ages of 12-19 vary between health zones. The rate is not yet at a level where there would be protection if an outbreak were to occur. For this reason, the following health directives will apply:

- Students and school personnel will wear masks in common indoor areas (classrooms are considered not common indoor areas while learning is ongoing);
- Activities and learning are encouraged to be held outdoors when the weather permits;
- Hand washing as part of the regular school routine;

- Students regularly disinfecting desks and other commonly touched surfaces;
- Assemblies will be permitted but all participants will be fully masked and schools will look at hosting smaller assemblies and taking advantage of outdoor spaces when weather permits;
- The use of indoor spaces under the [Community Use of Schools](#) will be limited to youth-based activities and organizations. This directive will be looked at before December and further directions will be communicated;
- Supply and visiting teachers will wear a mask in common areas (unless eating);
- Other itinerant school personnel as well as visiting professionals will wear a mask in common areas; and
- Visitors will be limited in schools, by appointment only and will wear masks inside the school.

Once the rate of youth with two doses of vaccine has reached 90 per cent in a health zone, students and school personnel, including supply and visiting teachers will be able to choose to not wear a mask in common areas and community use of schools will be permitted.

For high schools that also have students under the age of 12, mask wearing in common areas will continue and community use of school will continue to be limited to youth-based activities.

VISITOR LOG AND OTHER RECORD KEEPING

All schools will keep a daily log of all supply staff, itinerant school personnel, visiting professionals and other visitors that enter the building. If groupings of students from different classes are created for learning, the schools will keep a log of which students were learning together.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Early childhood services programs such as Talk with Me, Family and Early Childhood, Early Years Evaluation-Direct Assessment and Preschool Autism services will continue to be offered in schools during the day and after school hours. Parents may accompany their children but must remain masked at all times. Participants in these services should be separated from the school population when possible.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND TRAVEL

International students will meet the requirements issued by the Federal Government prior to attending a New Brunswick school. Students and school personnel who travel for vacation or to visit a parent as part of a formal custody arrangement will also meet the federal requirements.

VULNERABLE STUDENTS

The Canadian Pediatric Society supports the return to school for children dependent on the current pandemic phase in a geographical location. If a student has extraordinary medical requirements that would require them to learn from home in a normal school year, the school will work with the student, the parent and the student's pediatrician or medical provider to develop personalised learning plans.

In the event of an outbreak, schools may work with immunocompromised students who have chosen to continue to physically attend school, their families and pediatrician or medical provider to determine the steps in extraordinary situations.

The IWK has defined immunocompromised as being a person who:

- is having chemotherapy currently or have within the last 6 months
- is having radiation therapy
- has received a bone marrow transplant in the last year or Graft Versus Host Disease
- is a recipient of a solid organ transplant
- has sickle cell disease
- has a spleen that does not work
- has a genetic cause for immune dysfunction
- has HIV/AIDS
- is taking immunosuppressive medication
- has other history of immune suppression, as defined by a Physician.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Additional supplies and safety precautions may be required when working with students. In most cases this equipment would already be in place pre-pandemic and part of a student's Personalized Learning Plan, Individualized Behaviour Support Plan and/or Health Support Plan (Policy 704 – [Health Support Services](#)).

In the rare case that the required equipment is not already in a plan, the Education Support Services Team, in consultation with the Occupational Health and Safety Coordinators, will create a plan outlining the equipment needed, how this equipment will support the health and safety of the student and school personnel working with the student, and the proper use of the equipment.

MENTAL HEALTH

We will focus on building a culture of respect, kindness and mindfulness by promoting and modelling safe and healthy behaviours. We will continue to collaborate with schools and school districts to ensure adequate supports and resources are in place to respond to the needs of students and school personnel including training, work to improve access to services and implementation of the curricula. Any additional resources put in place for wellness and mental health in the 2020-21 school year will remain available.

CASE CONTROL MEASURES / OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT

Confirmed case

We will continue to work with Public Health, schools and school districts to follow the same outbreak management process used throughout the 2020-21 school year that allowed our students to learn throughout the year with minimal disruptions to learning, limited cases in schools and very few in-school transmissions. School districts will continue to inform families directly when a positive case of COVID-19 has an impact on a school community or when there is in-school transmission along with any impact the confirmed case may have on learning.

Most cases we have seen in schools throughout our province have been linked to a symptomatic household member. In the 2020-21 school year, students were not the driving force of COVID-19 spread in schools or in community settings. When cases impacted schools, it was usually the result of activities happening in the greater community, such as gatherings amongst friends, and not because of the school setting or in-school contacts.

When a case or cases of COVID-19 are confirmed within a school, Regional Public Health works with the school and school district staff to carry out a detailed risk assessment. This Public Health assessment looks at a number of factors including but not limited to:

- how prevalent cases are within the greater community;
- whether the case involves a presumed variant;
- how many close contacts the individual who tested positive has had and how early the case was detected;
- the layers of protection that were in place while they were at school such as masking or assigned seating;
- shared spaces between the individual who tested positive and others (lockers, hallways, kitchens, breakrooms, etc.);
- and the vaccination rate of the school or greater community.

Once the risk assessment is completed, Public Health gives direction to students and school personnel based on all these factors within the circumstances of each individual situation. This is why two schools may respond to confirmed cases differently.

When a case or cases are confirmed, families, students and school personnel must be prepared for any of the following outcomes:

- Following a case which has an impact on students, schools will switch to distance learning or may be closed as an operational day to allow for contact tracing and testing. Public Health may require that the school continue to offer distance learning for a longer period if contact tracing and testing is not completed;
- Individuals identified as close contacts being directed to learn or work from home;
- Groups of individuals being directed to learn or work from home (i.e. a classroom, bus, or grade level);
- Groups who work or learn in a particular area of the school being directed to learn or work from home (a certain wing of the school); or
- The entire school being directed to learn and/or work from home.

As the school system learns to live with COVID-19, the system will need to be agile and adjust quickly. Students and school personnel may be staying home because they have symptoms or are directed by Public Health to isolate. This may be individuals, groups or classrooms. For this reason, schools will be prepared to do the following, in addition to following any of the above directives:

- Temporary directives from Public Health may include that wind instruments not be played and that singing be done with a mask;
- Reducing the amount of contact between students in separate classrooms and managing traffic in the hallways as students move through the school; or
- Restrictions may be imposed on assemblies as well as interscholastic, extra-curricular and intramural activities.

Online and home learning

If students are sent home because of an outbreak in the school, teachers will be ready to ensure learning continues.

For students in Kindergarten through Grade 8, this may include home learning kits, homework or a mix of virtual and paper-based learning, similar to the past year.

High school personnel will be ready to teach any students directed to learn from home online until they are able to return to school. This may include synchronous or project-based learning, but teachers will connect with students every day.

School Absenteeism Guided Measures

School administrators will notify the Regional Public Health Office in cases of outbreaks or unusual situations, such as when absenteeism of students or school personnel is greater than would be expected, or severe illness is observed.

Outbreak Management Process

1. The Regional Medical Office of Health will notify the superintendent by telephone of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school in their school district. All other confirmed case(s) related to the outbreak will be communicated to the Superintendent by either telephone or by email.
2. The superintendent and the school principal must follow the orders of the Regional Public Health Office.
3. The school principals will inform parents and school personnel of a positive case of COVID-19 in their school and that more information will be coming from the Regional Public Health office.
4. Regional Public Health will be involved to manage the outbreak, ensure contacts are identified, ensure public health measures are in place, advise on any additional cleaning/disinfection requirements and lead any communication that is required.
5. Communication to the school community will be guided by the Regional Medical Officer of Health, in collaboration with the school principal and superintendent.
6. Confidentiality of a suspect or confirmed case is paramount. It is important that all personal health information remain confidential unless Public Health requires the information for contact tracing. Only a limited amount of school personnel, on an as needed basis for contact tracing, will be informed of the name of the individual who has tested positive for COVID-19.
7. Public Health Officers will contact those individuals who must self-monitor or self-isolate. Public Health Officers will decide if a class, classes or the entire school population needs to be sent home to self-monitor or self-isolate. They will inform the school principal and the school district of the actions needed.
8. If exclusion/isolation is required, principals must ensure that measures are in place to inform parents and school personnel of the situation and of how important this control measure is with resources from Regional Public Health. Proper exclusion/isolation is one of the most important and effective measures in controlling the spread of disease to others. Parental and school personnel cooperation is critical.
9. Public Health Officers or Public Safety Officers will monitor anybody who has been ordered to self-isolate.
10. In the event a school is required to close due to an outbreak, the Regional Medical Officer of Health will give the directives in collaboration with the superintendent. The Regional Medical Officer of Health will notify the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. The superintendent is required to notify the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
11. Teaching and learning must not stop if students are sent home because of an outbreak. As part of their preparations for the upcoming school year, school personnel must develop contingency plans for continued learning when students are not physically able to be in school. For example, teachers may have kits that they can send home with younger students, they may be ready to teach online, etc.

- Public Health Officers will inform those individuals who have been ordered to self-isolate of when the order ends. Public Health Officers will inform the principal or the school district of when a class or a school (students and/or school personnel) can physically return to the school building.

Responses Following a Confirmed COVID-19 Case(s) in a School

Regional Public Health response:



- Identify and notify the Superintendent of a confirmed case(s).
- Contact tracing and notify all individuals who have been in contact with the case(s).
- Provide directives to Superintendent and school principal on self-isolation (individuals, classrooms and schools) and cleaning and disinfecting.
- Notify the Superintendent and school principal when it is safe for individuals to return.

School principal response:



- Activate the Emergency Response Team, the Outbreak Management Plan, and the school Crisis Plan if required. This may need to be done virtually as it was last year.
- Gather and provide contact tracing information to Regional Public Health, including extracurricular activities.
- Notify all school personnel and parents of confirmed case(s) or exposure after receiving approval from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Regional Public Health. Direct all questions from parents that cannot be answered to the school district.
- Direct media requests concerning the confirmed case(s) to the Communication Director at the school district.
- Follow all Regional Public Health directives, including self-isolation and cleaning and disinfecting protocols.

School district response:



- Notify the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Deputy and Assistant Deputy Ministers, Worksafe NB, the DEC and any Chief of First Nation communities of confirmed case(s).
- Activate the Emergency Response Team in cooperation with the school.
- Notify any other relevant school personnel (bus drivers, custodians, etc.).
- Coordinate all relevant tracing transportation information for Regional Public Health.
- Communicate any relevant information to any Early Learning and Childcare facility that is located in a school with a confirmed case(s).
- Send any relevant human resource information to affected school personnel.

- Provide any additional support to school principals as needed.

Department of Education and Early Childhood

Development response:



- Provide support to the school principal and school district.
- Communicate with unions and professional associations.
- Respond to any questions from unions.

Teachers' response:



- Respect confidential information of confirmed case(s).
- Cooperate with Regional Public Health and the school principal.
- Organize and mobilize full-time distance learning.
- Be calm, respectful and kind, and talk with students about confidentiality, etc.

Custodial staff response:



- Respect confidential information of confirmed case(s).
- Follow the directives from the school principal and the school district on appropriate cleaning and disinfecting protocols.

Bus drivers' response:



- Respect confidential information of confirmed case(s).
- Cooperate with Regional Public Health.
- Follow appropriate cleaning and disinfecting protocols.