

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS RETURN TO SCHOOL 2020

Current as of August 25, 2020

Reference A. B.C.'s Back to School Plan <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/covid-19-return-to-school>

B. Covid-19 School Occupancy Requirements and Protocols
https://bit.ly/SD71_COVID19Protocols

C. COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/k-12-covid-19-health-safety-guidelines.pdf>

LEARNING GROUPS / COHORTS

Q. Is there a way for our district to restrict the size to 40 or under for elementary? And use 60 for high school?

A. Cohort size is set by the provincial government. Compared to other public settings, schools have a relatively consistent set of people accessing the building. Learning groups further reduce the number of interactions between students and staff. This helps with contact tracing and limits interruptions to learning if a case of COVID-19 is confirmed in a learning group.

A full explanation of Learning Groups, which are also referred to as cohorts, can be found on the Ministry of Education website at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/covid-19-return-to-school>

Q. I keep hearing our district referred to as K to 12. How are you considering StrongStart in this plan?

A. At this time, StrongStart is not included in the provincial K to 12 Restart Plan. However, last spring, our StrongStart facilitators worked on outreach programs which focused on connecting with families in various community settings. Our plan is for this work to continue later on this year.

Q. How will recess, lunch, arrival and dismissal work within cohorts?

A. The BCCDC's public health guidance for K-12 schools recommends a number of strategies to support physical distancing for students and staff in schools: including staggered pick-up and drop-off times to prevent crowding; staggered recess/snack, lunch and class transition times to provide a greater amount of space for everyone. Schools will use the orientation time at the start of the school year on September 8 and 9 to communicate these strategies with students, staff and parents. Each school will have its own plan.

Q. If families are not comfortable with or feel confident in the cohort structure are students required to attend school in-person in September?

A. Based on current public health advice and the health and safety plans, K-12 schools are safe to re-open in Stage 2 for September.

Comox Valley Schools plans and protocols provide a safe environment for all staff and students. If families choose not to return to a face-to-face delivery model, we offer alternate programming through Navigate NIDES. However, we would request that families discuss their concerns and options with their school principal

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Q. Will the board commit to using physical barriers in all classrooms between people if physical distancing is just not possible? Why aren't plexiglass barriers planned to be in common use in classrooms?

A. The PHO recommends installing barriers only when people can't keep a healthy distance of two metres / six feet) and when people interact with a high number of individuals (ex. reception desk).

Our physical distance strategies and health and safety protocols are designed to reduce the number of close, in-person interactions.

- People in a learning group don't need to stay two metres apart but they must limit physical contact.
- Classrooms will be set up to promote spacing between students where possible.
- Outside of a learning group, including extracurricular activities, middle and secondary students and all K-12 staff must keep a healthy distance.
- Rigorous hand hygiene will be enforced with increased number of handwashing stations and hand sanitizers in school settings.
- Floor markings and posters will be installed to show traffic flow throughout the school. This may include one-way hallways and designated entrance and exit doors

Q. Will the board consider exceeding the provincial regulations by directing management to create school plans where physical distancing is enforced in all rooms in every school at all times?

A. Cohort size is set by the provincial government. Compared to other public settings, schools have a relatively consistent set of people accessing the building. Learning groups further reduce the number of interactions between students and staff. This helps with contact tracing and limits interruptions to learning if a case of COVID-19 is confirmed in a learning group.

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Q. Why are class sizes not being cut back to allow for proper social distance measures like in June when they did hybrid learning?

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SIBLINGS

Q. Are siblings placed in the same school cohort.

A. Cohorts have been organized by age rather than traditional buddy class (ex. Grade 7 partner with a K-class). Siblings of a different grade will not likely be in the same cohort.

Q. If drop off/pick up times are staggered, will family/sibling groupings be considered?

A. Children will be dropped off and picked up at school at the same time, however, entry and exit from the building will be staggered.

Q. What happens if a child is in a split class. Can they interact with their peers in the same grade level from another class?

A. Cohorts will work together and interact together during recess and lunch. Schools will have designated play zones for cohorts which will be rotated through scheduling.

Q. How much outside time will be guaranteed for elementary students?

A. Schools will maximize the amount of outdoor activity time. Inclement weather will have an impact on these activities so students will be encouraged to dress appropriately for wet and cold weather.

DISTANCE LEARNING

Q. If we choose to stay home because we are not happy or comfortable with the proposed plan, what are our options?

A. In-class instruction provides students with peer engagement, supports social and emotional development and decreases feelings of isolation. School also provides many students access to programs and services they can't get at home and is integral to their overall health. However, like every school year, parents have options for their child's education which includes Distance Learning (DL) or homeschooling. Our DL provider is Navigate NIDES. We encourage parents to discuss their concerns with their school principal.

Q. Will a child(ren) lose their spots in a program of choice (example French Immersion) if the DL option is chosen?

A. No. Spots will be reserved for students that leave their neighbourhood school or choice program while they opt for an alternative delivery model of education (DL or homeschooling). Their spot will be held at the school until September 2021/22 school year.

Q. When would students be allowed to return to their regular classroom if they don't start the year at school?

A. We will accept students to school at anytime when families are ready and comfortable. We would ask that families work with their school principal to discuss specific details and dates.

Q. Will incoming families be offered to hold a spot in a catchment school or placed on a waitlist?

A. Every student will have a placement in SD71. We will do our best to ensure the placement is in their neighbourhood school, however, there are many factors to be considered, and it may not always be possible.

Q. Has a hybrid model been considered for SD71?

A. Yes it has, and, in many cases, a type of hybrid model will be used, however, we are not using it system-wide as that is not the direction provided to the District from the Ministry of Education.

CONTINUITY OF LEARNING

Q. Will there be more continuity in terms of expectations for delivery of learning?

A. Yes. It is always our expectation that all teachers cover the curriculum.

Q. How will you ensure that grads get the courses they need for post-secondary?

A. The focus will remain on ensuring students are making progress towards completing their graduation requirements. Schools will work with students to ensure they have the required prerequisite courses for post-secondary school.

MASKS / PPE

Q. Why are masks not mandatory?

A. Every student and staff member will be given two masks when they return to school in September.

Under the updated health and safety guidelines, masks are required for all staff and all students in middle and secondary school when they are in high traffic areas such as hallways, and anytime they are outside their classroom or learning group when they cannot safely distance from others.

Students will have the choice to wear a mask in the classroom. Students 11 years of age and older are required to wear a non-medical mask while riding the bus.

Staff will have the choice to wear a mask when interacting within their learning group. Even when wearing a mask, staff and students will still be required to maintain physical distance from people outside of their learning group. Staff teaching multiple cohorts or at multiple school sites will be required to wear masks when physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Exceptions will be made for students and staff who cannot wear masks for medical reasons.

A full explanation of these Health and Safety Measures can be found on the Ministry of Education website at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/covid-19-return-to-school>.

Q. If there is funding for the schools to obtain some PPE, can SD71 please get face shields over masks?

A. The BC Government has set aside additional funding of \$2.2 million for reusable face masks for students and staff. Face masks are to be worn in lieu of face shields under the direction of the PHO a face shields must be worn in conjunction with a mask as a shield alone does not provide protection.

Under the updated health and safety guidelines, masks will be required for staff, middle and secondary students in high traffic areas such as buses and in common areas such as hallways, or anytime outside of their learning group whenever physical distancing cannot be maintained. Otherwise, the wearing of masks in the confines of a cohort is not required or mandatory. Face shields will not be enforced +or replace the use of face masks.

Canadian Shield, a manufacturer of personal protective equipment products in Ontario, Canada, recently announced it is donating an additional 54,500 face shields for K-12 schools in B.C., adding to the inventory of personal protective equipment that will be available for students and staff. Should face shield be encouraged for use in our schools, we will provide details of how it will be implemented into our Health and Safety program.

Q. Will students ages 10+ be required to wear a mask regardless of the grade configuration of the school?

A. No. Elementary school students are not required to wear masks. Students will have the choice to wear a mask in the classroom. Students 11 years of age and older are required to wear a non-medical mask while riding the bus.

Q. What is being done to protect the rights and safety of students that will not be wearing masks? i.e.: no peer pressure, no intimidation, no abuse of teacher/faculty to student relationship, etc.

A. Dr. Bonnie Henry, the Ministry of Education and our Board of Education make it clear that everyone must treat each other with respect whether wearing a mask or not.

The school district has a [Zero Tolerance Harassment Policy](#). Staff will be vigilant to watch for discriminatory and bullying behaviour toward others based on many factors. We also educate and promote in our school communities the [ERASE BC](#) program, which provides an effective reporting tool for any student or staff who has been subject to or witnessed bullying for whatever the reasons – gender, sexual orientation, ethnic /cultural background, attire/dress.

VENTILATION

Q. Is the ventilation being upgraded?

A. Yes, the District has improved ventilation by replacing all HVAC filters as scheduled twice per year. The HVAC controls are being fully reprogrammed to comply with ASHRAE COVID protocols for Schools and Universities (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers).

Additional measures include flushing all schools with fresh air for two hours prior to occupancy, increasing outdoor air flow into classrooms by opening dampers, lowering the CO2 sensor levels, and increasing the run time on occupancy sensors amongst other changes.

Q. Are buses properly ventilated?

A. Yes, buses will operate with mechanical and natural ventilation at all times. As a minimum every other window on the bus must be opened one-quarter (¼) of the way. Mechanical ventilation must be switched on, set to a high setting in operated in the nonrecirculating mode. Roof hatches will be opened to the maximum extent possible given weather conditions. School administrators will advise parents and caregivers of the ventilation protocol and encourage students to dress accordingly to the seasons and weather conditions. Details are found in the [Reoccupancy Requirements and Protocols Section 7.4](#).

5-STAGE FRAMEWORK

Q. Will school stages be decided by the school districts based on what is happening in their region or does the Ministry of Education and BC health authority make stage decisions for all schools in BC which could be based on COVID numbers in Lower Mainland schools?

A. No, transition from one stage to another in the 5-stage framework is decided by the BC Government in conjunction with direction from the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) and will, at

this time, be implemented for all of the province as opposed to one region from the next regardless of the COVID-19 cases between one public health authority to another.

Q. Is there a potential that school closures (online learning) could occur again if there is a significant increase in COVID -19 cases? Would this decision be based on local (VIHA) data, or would it be based on entire BC data?

A. Transition from one stage to another in the 5-Stage BC Restart Plan is decided by the BC Government in conjunction with direction from the PHO. Stage transition is implemented for all of the province as opposed to one region from the next regardless of the COVID-19 cases between one public health authority and another.

PRE-EXISTING HEALTH CONDITIONS

Q. My child has asthma and is a high-risk household members. He is in grade 12. Will his ability to graduate going to be affected if he does not return to the classroom?

A. According to the PHO and the BCCDC, most children who are immunocompromised can return to in-class instruction when safety measures are in place.

Parents of students who are immune-compromised or have underlying medical conditions are encouraged to consult with their health care provider to determine their level of risk regarding return to school. If a medical professional determines that a student cannot attend school due to their health risks, contact your school principal and they will work with you to review alternative learning options for the student.

Students who need to stay at home because they are immune-compromised will have an at-home learning plan and will be provided with an educational program by their school district. Full details can be found online at <http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID19-easing-social-distancing-IS-children.pdf>. Details surrounding students with Immune Suppression are available at <http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID-19-IS-Children-FAQ-BCCH.pdf>

In situations where in-class instruction is being supplemented with self-directed or remote learning, the focus will remain on ensuring students are making progress towards completing their graduation requirements.

VULNERABLE LEARNERS

Q. How can you work to protect vulnerable families (low income and single parents, for example). Could those children be prioritized to go back to school, or to have tutors funded?

A. All students are welcome and encouraged to return to school for face-to-face, in-class instruction. The District has well-documented procedures and protocols that are carried out by schools to identify and provide services to address students' learning needs.

Q. How can families who cannot afford public transit be supported?

A. Parents should contact their child's school principal and discuss a plan for addressing individual transportation needs.

CONFIRMED COVID CASE IN A SCHOOL

Q. What happens if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school?

A. If a student or staff member develops symptoms at school, [protocols](#) are in place as detailed in the [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings UPDATED: July 29, 2020](#)

- If a student or staff member develops symptoms at school, they will be given a non-medical mask and will be isolated from their classmates or colleagues until arrangements can be made for them to return home.
- The individual's parent or guardian will be contacted to discuss next steps.
- Staff supervising symptomatic children must use strict hand washing techniques, wear a surgical mask and face shield and, where tolerated, have the ill student wear a surgical mask.
- Custodial staff will clean and disinfect the areas the person came in contact with.
- Schools will immediately inform public health of a potential case.
- Public health will then:
 - Reach out and identify any potential cases
 - Get in touch with close contacts
 - Recommend 14-day isolation if necessary
 - Provide follow-up recommendations if necessary
- Schools will provide learning support to students required to self-isolate.

Q. If a child or staff member tests positive for Covid-19, will the cohort need to self-isolate?

A. Our schools and the District will take the direction given by Island Health and the PHO regarding next steps.

Q. What will the impetus be for family members to get tested if they can still send their asymptomatic children to school, as long as they family member has not tested positive for COVID-19?

A. The District will continue to advise staff and parents to stay home or keep their children home when a close family member is ill. [This varies from the BCCDC guideline, which states:](#) "A student may still receive in-person instruction if another person in their home has symptoms of

common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease, but they remain asymptomatic.”

Q. Will the privacy of a student be protected if they test positive for COVID-19.

A. If a student member develops symptoms, [protocols](#) are in place as detailed in the [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings UPDATED: July 29, 2020](#). Public health will be notified and will keep the information of all cases confirmed positive confidential. Schools will not provide notification to staff or students’ families if a staff member or student becomes ill at home or at school, including if they display symptoms of COVID-19, unless directed to by public health.

Q. I have concern that some parents will not complete this monitoring as required. Can this monitoring be completed systematically by school staff to ensure that it is completed sufficiently?

A. Parents and caregivers must assess their child daily for symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease before sending them to school. If a child has any symptoms, they must not go to school.

Staff and other adults must assess themselves daily for symptoms of common cold, influenza, or COVID-19 prior to entering the school. If staff or any adult has any symptoms, they must not enter the school. Details of self assessments, personal measures and home monitoring are available at http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID_public_guidance/Guidance-k-12-schools.pdf and in Appendix G of the [COVID -19 Reoccupancy Requirements and Protocols](#).

Schools will not conduct screening. Instead, school administrators are to ensure staff and other adults know they are responsible for assessing themselves daily for symptoms prior to entering the school. Schools will continue to clearly communicate with parents and caregivers that they are responsible for assessing their children daily before sending them to school.

Q. How will student’s learning be supported at home when they are sick? It is anticipated that absences will be significantly higher than in other years because of the requirements to stay home when showing signs and symptoms. How will teachers deliver in-person instruction and support so many learners at home?

A. As in all cases when a child is sick, schools will work with the family to develop a plan.

MEAL PROGRAMS

Q. Will you continue hot lunch and other feeding programs?

A. Schools can continue to include food preparation as part of learning and provide food services, including meal programs and hot lunch.

If food is prepared as part of learning and is consumed by the student(s) who prepared it, no additional measures beyond those articulated in this document and normal food safety measures and requirements need to be implemented (e.g. FOODSAFE trained staff, a food safety plan, etc.).

If food is prepared within or outside a school for consumption by people other than those who prepared it (including for sale), it is expected that the WorkSafe BC Protocols for returning to operation are implemented as appropriate and as relevant to the school setting, in addition to normally implemented food safety measures and requirements (e.g. FOODSAFE trained staff, a food safety plan, etc.).

Schools should not allow homemade food items to be made available to other students at this time (e.g. birthday treats, bake sale items). [Page 11 of 18 The June 19th, 2020 Order of the Provincial health Officer Food Service Establishments and Liquor Services](#) does not apply to schools.

Schools should continue to emphasize that food and beverages should not be shared.

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Q. What metrics are in place to measure and monitor the mental and emotional health of students?

A. Mental health and wellness is one of our top priorities as identified in the Board of Education's 2019/23 Strategic Priorities Plan. In addition to the classroom teacher, our schools are staffed with counselors and, in secondary and alternate schools, we also employ youth and family program workers who are trained to assess and monitor student wellness. All our helping professionals are required to maintain and report on their caseloads.