

CIRCULAR

Date: August 31, 2020

To: Superintendents of School Divisions
Principals of Funded Independent School Principals
Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
Manitoba School Boards Association
Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools
Manitoba Association of School Business Officials
Manitoba Teachers' Society
Manitoba Association of Parent Councils

Subject: COVID-19 K-12 Education Guidance and Protocols - Update

Circular Number: COVID19: 2020-001

Type: Policy Procedure For Information

Effective Date: Immediately

Background

On August 24, 2020, the Manitoba government updated *COVID-19 K-12 School Settings Practice Guidance and Protocols* (originally released on August 13, 2020). This document outlines key public health and educational policy information to support planning for the 2020-21 school year, with the goal of maximizing in-class learning while minimizing the risk of transmission and exposure to COVID-19 in Manitoba's K-12 schools.

This circular highlights the August 24, 2020 updates to the *Practice Guidance and Protocols*. It also provides additional information and clarification of questions received from school divisions and schools as they continue to plan for September.

Revised COVID-19 K-12 School Settings Practice Guidance and Protocols

(Last updated August 24, 2020)

Web: <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/restoring/rss-practice-guidance.html>

PDF: https://manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/covid/k-12-reopeningplan-guidance.pdf

Key updates include:

- Clarification on the suspension of the community use of schools: School divisions and schools will need to assess their capacity to accommodate nursery, before and after, and other education programming (e.g., driver training) while prioritizing in-class instruction and public health measures.
- Recess/Lunch Breaks: Schools can continue to offer cafeteria services, breakfast and lunch programs with necessary adjustments to ensure health guidelines are in place.
 - Food Handling: With the exception of culinary programs that are supervised by qualified staff and follow industry standards, cease activities involving student participation in food preparation.

Clarification of Policy and Guidelines

1. Remote learning for students for medical/ immune compromised reasons

As directed in COVID-19 K-12 School Settings Guidance and Protocols, division-level remote learning will be in place for students who are medically advised not to return to in-class learning due to COVID-19 related factors. These situations should be rare and limited to children with compromised immune systems or other medical conditions that increase their risk. Parents and caregivers must consult with physicians on the need for accommodation.

A medical note is not required to ascertain the medical needs. The small number of children who are immunocompromised are likely already known to the school. However, school divisions and independent schools can request a medical note if needed. If a note is requested, school divisions should use a form letter, that the health care provider signs, that outlines the policy direction above to ensure that the health care provider can indicate that this situation applies to a particular student or immediate family member. Parental/caregiver contact information should be included on the form.

Schools or divisions must follow up by phone (or alternate method) with each family to discuss and ensure that parents/caregivers understand what is involved with learning at home and that this could be for the entire year until the spread of COVID-19 is broadly contained and a vaccine and/or effective treatment for COVID-19 is available.

Learning expectations are described in the Response Planning for K-12 Learning document posted at: <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/learning/responseplan.html> Additional guidance is being prepared based on requests from school divisions and will be shared shortly.

2. Staggered re-entry to school

School divisions and schools will limit staggered starts in September to the first week of classes. If additional time is needed to support transitions, socialize students to new routines and public health measures, and to assess recovery learning needs, the school should use support staff to monitor groups of children while teachers focus on small groups or individual students.

3. Religious exercises and instruction

School divisions and schools will need to work with their communities to find flexible approaches to conducting religious exercises and instruction in schools while maintaining required public health measures. Public health advice is to minimize the numbers of cohorts to limit risk of possible exposures. The department is encouraging school to find innovative approaches to providing religious exercises and instruction, including:

- Using both the time before or after school; during break times or recess, or other non-instructional time (religious exercises only)
- Holding exercises and instruction outdoors when possible
- Holding exercises in different locations in the school
- Holding exercises and instruction at different times throughout the day for separate cohorts of students
- If necessary to adhere to public health guidance, reducing the frequency of religious exercises or instruction, to stagger the activities for different cohorts over the week.

The general physical distancing guidance must be followed when moving around in a school. This applies to arriving, departing and being at the activity.

4. *Patriotic observances (O Canada)*

In consideration of public health advice regarding singing and coral programs during the pandemic, schools and school divisions should play a recording of O Canada in schools and refrain from singing the anthem until public health guidance changes.

Guidance on Mask Use

• *Guidance for Mask Use in Schools*

https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/mask_guidance.pdf

Parents encouraged to practice mask wearing with children and to provide masks for their children to ensure fit/comfort. Masks will be available in schools and on buses for those who need them.

• *COVID-19 Response in K-12 Schools and Early Learning and Child Care Centres*

https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/covid_response_k-12_schools.pdf

https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/m12/covid/reouverture/docs/response_covid_ecoles_m-12.pdf

Outlines what happens if there is a case of COVID-19 in a school or centre, including the notification process and public health response. The document also provides scenarios and examples of the response due to illness or confirmed/probable cases linked to a school.

Additional Resources

For more information on Manitoba Education's COVID-19 response, including regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions, please see www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid.

If you have any questions regarding the COVID-19 response, please email educovid19@gov.mb.ca.