

CIRCULAR

Date: September 8, 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: 2020-002

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* <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/restoring/rss-practice-guidance.html> (originally released on August 13, 2020). The Practice Guidance and Protocols 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 provides updated information and clarification of questions received from school divisions and schools for the 2020-21 school year, specifically related to masks, safety drills and ventilation.

Updated Guidance on Mask Use on School Buses

Further to the COVID19: 2020-001 Circular issued on August 31, 2020, there are updated guidelines regarding the use of masks on school buses. Masks are required on all school buses, as passengers may be in close proximity for extended periods of time. This is a change from the previous requirement that only applied to students in Grades 4 and above. This updated guidance includes drivers, students and any other passengers on the bus.

Further revisions to mask guidance are underway to provide additional clarity regarding questions raised by education stakeholders, parents and the public.

Guidance for Mask Use in Schools:

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

Safety Drills

Fire Drills

Both the Manitoba Fire Code and the Safe Schools Regulation require schools to hold at least 10 fire drills in a school year. Public health advice is to limit large groups of students gathering in and around schools. While fire drills are imperative to ensure safety of students, they may cause crowding in some school spaces, such as hallways and at gathering spots. The Office of the Fire Commissioner has advised that the required 10 fire drills must continue to take place. However, while physical distancing is required in schools, school divisions and schools may use alternative ways of conducting fire drills that accommodate public health advice. This may include:

- the separate evacuation of one section of a school/a certain number of classrooms
- the separate evacuation of one classroom at a given time
- drills being held on different days.

If any portion of the evacuation drill may not be conducted because it does not allow for physical distancing, verbal instructions should be given. Students should also be reminded that in a real emergency situation, they should exit the school as quickly as possible and that physical distancing is not needed.

Lockdown Drills

School divisions and schools will continue to hold one lockdown drill in each term or semester of the school year while ensuring general physical distancing guidance is followed. If any portion of the lockdown drill may not be conducted because it does not allow for physical distancing, verbal instructions should be given. Students should be reminded that in a real emergency situation, physical distancing is not needed.

Bus Evacuation Drills

School divisions and schools will ensure that all students participate in emergency school bus evacuation drills, which will be conducted at least once during the fall term and at least once during the spring term. School bus evacuation drills should be conducted separately with groups of students already established as in-school cohorts and/or school bus cohorts and may need to be adjusted to ensure physical distancing when exiting the bus and when gathering at the muster point. Portions of the evacuation drill may not be able to be conducted, such as evacuating a school bus from the rear exit door because it requires physical contact to assist students exiting the bus. In this case, verbal instructions should be given. Students should also be reminded that in a real emergency situation, they should exit the bus as quickly as possible and that physical distancing is not needed. Masks must be worn by all students and staff participating in the drill and hand hygiene must be performed before and after being on the bus.

Ventilation

School divisions and schools are reminded that the fundamentals of social distancing, surface cleaning and disinfection, handwashing and other strategies of good hygiene should not be superseded by ventilation practices.

The *Practice Guidance and Protocols* document includes guidelines respecting ventilation, in order to maximize fresh air intake and minimize airflow patterns that might increase exposure to particles. Additional specific measures to support these efforts is provided below:

- Maintain proper indoor air temperature and humidity to maintain human comfort, reduce potential for spread of airborne pathogens and limit potential for mold growth in building structure and finishes.

- Verify filters are installed correctly. Maximize the filters capability by sealing the filter cabinet and eliminating any air bypass.
- Monitor filters for replacement, check for particulate accumulation on filters and replace as required. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) during the checks.
- In Demand-Controlled Ventilation (DCV) systems using Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) sensors, operate systems to maintain maximum CO₂ concentrations of 800-1,000 Parts Per Million (ppm) in occupied spaces.
- Daily air flush prior to occupancy: mechanical systems should be operated in occupied mode for a minimum of 2 hours prior to occupants re-entering the building. Systems should be operating in occupied mode an additional 2 hours after occupants have left the building. The intent is to maximize the fresh air to the space.
- Verify that P-traps on condensate drains are full.
- Check control system and devices for evidence of improper operation.
- Confirm that air handling units (AHU), roof-top units (RTU) and unit ventilators (UV) are bringing in outdoor air and that outdoor air dampers are open.
- Verify that exhaust fans and exhaust systems are operating correctly.
- Ensure airflow patterns in classrooms are adjusted to minimize occupant exposure to particles (i.e. avoid fans or diffusers blowing directly at people).

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.