



September 2020

Welcoming Our Students Back: Restoring Safe Schools

Parent/Guardian and Educator Frequently Asked Questions

Public Health Measures

How long does a person need to self-isolate if they are identified as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19?

- They must quarantine (self-isolate) for 14 days from their last contact with the case.*

How long does a person need to isolate if they have flu-like or COVID-19 symptoms and they have a test that says they do not have COVID-19?

- They may return to work or school 24 hours after they are symptom-free if they have a COVID-19 test and the result confirms that they do not have COVID-19.*

How long does a person need to isolate if they have a COVID-19 test that shows they have COVID-19?

- They must isolate for a minimum of 10 days following a positive COVID-19 test, and until their symptoms have resolved for 24 hours. Public Health will notify them when they can come out of isolation.*

How long does a person need to isolate if they have flu-like or COVID-19 symptoms and do not get tested for COVID-19?

- They must isolate for 10 days following the onset of symptoms. They can stop isolation at Day 10 if they have been symptom-free for 24 hours.*

* For more information, see www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/factsheet-isolation-selfmonitoring-recoveringhome.pdf.

How will students get to school?

- School buses will be running in September for those students who are eligible for school bus transportation.
- For the short term, parents are encouraged to transport their own children to school, if at all possible.
- Schools will be implementing protocols to ensure that entry and exit from the school are managed to avoid congestion.

How far apart will students be sitting from one another on the bus?

- When possible, one student per seat is recommended; however, children from the same household and students in the same in-school cohorts may also sit together on the bus.
- Students will have assigned seats on the bus and must remain in those seats at all times while on the bus.

Are students, teachers, and staff required to wear a mask during all hours of the school day?

- Yes. Non-medical masks are required for students in Grades 4 to 12, teachers, staff, visitors, and volunteers when physical distancing of two metres is not possible. Parents and caregivers will continue to choose whether younger students wear a mask.
- There may be times throughout the day that students will have sufficient space to be physically distanced so that masks can be removed, such as during lunch breaks or mask-free play outdoors at recess.
- Masks will be provided at the school if needed. Non-medical masks will be added on the school supply list as well. The Government of Canada has a very short video on how to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly at www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/video/covid-19-wear-non-medical-mask-face-covering-properly.html.

Does my child need to wear a mask on the school bus?

- Yes. Students, as well as bus drivers, and any other passengers, are required to wear non-medical masks on school buses. Masks should be put on before getting on the bus and taken off after exiting the bus. A mask will be provided for them if they do not have one.

Will the bus driver wear a mask?

- Yes. Drivers are also required to wear a mask.

What if my child loses their mask at school?

- Schools will provide masks to students and staff who need them.
- Schools will also have a supply of non-medical and medical masks on hand.

Does wearing a mask mean that other public health measures can be reduced?

- No. Wearing non-medical masks is an **additional layer of protection** that can help to prevent the infectious respiratory droplets of an unknowingly infected person (the wearer) from coming into contact with other people. This follows public health advice that a mask may be a helpful tool to reduce the risk of infection or transmission when an individual cannot be two metres from others.

Who should not wear masks?

- Non-medical masks should not be worn by anyone who
 - is unable to remove the mask without assistance (for example, due to age, ability, or developmental status)
 - has breathing difficulties
 - is under the age of 2

How do I request remote learning for a student when the student or caregiver is immunocompromised or has underlying medical conditions? Is a medical note required?

- Public health has advised that a medical note is not required when a student is requesting remote learning due to a physician-approved medical condition. Furthermore, children who are immunocompromised are likely already known to the school.
- In certain instances, if needed, school divisions and independent schools may request a medical note. School divisions should use a form letter that details how the particular student or immediate family member's situation aligns with the remote learning policy. The form should be signed by the physician and include parent/caregiver contact information.
- Schools or divisions must follow up with each family by phone to ensure that parents/caregivers understand what is involved with remote learning. Schools or divisions must notify parents/caregivers that remote learning arrangements remain in effect until the spread of COVID-19 is broadly contained and a vaccine and/or effective treatment is available, most likely the entire school year.

Will in-school child care facilities require that masks be worn and/or will they operate at reduced capacity to allow for social distancing?

- Public health advice in *COVID-19 Early Learning and Child Care Practice Guidance* (June 2020) (see https://manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/covid/famcirculars/Covid-19_ELCC_Practice_Guide_-_UPDATED_June_2020.pdf) indicates that the use of non-medical masks (cloth or homemade masks) within child care settings is not recommended. However, some staff and children may choose to bring and wear a non-medical mask while in the centre. Masks are not recommended for children under two years of age.

- Also, as of June 1, 2020, licensed child care centres, including facilities in schools, can continue to provide care for up to 24 children. Larger centres with separate rooms and external entrances can accommodate up to 24 children per room. Home-based child care providers can also continue to operate with the number of children for which they are licensed.
- Schools will be asked to work cooperatively with child care centres to ensure that these centres can continue to operate.

Will my child's temperature be taken when they arrive at school?

- No. Parents and caregivers will need to screen their children before sending them to school.
- Schools may also support children with self-screening, but temperature checks at school are not recommended. Normal temperatures are different for everybody and can vary throughout the day.

Will smaller class sizes be implemented to allow for physical distancing, and, if so, will extra school space be converted to classrooms (e.g., gyms)?

- Schools and divisions will ensure physical distancing among students, teachers, and staff to the best extent possible, including through the use of alternative spaces like multi-purpose rooms if needed. Class sizes will not be capped, as public health advice does not warrant reducing the number of students to a specific number.

How far apart will students be sitting from one another at school?

- Public health recommends two metres of physical distancing. When this is not possible, students will remain within cohorts to reduce exposure to others. Cohorts will distance themselves at least four metres from other groups to limit exposure. In these instances, there must be at least one metre between students when seated at desks or tables.

Will there be special breaks for hand washing and desk cleaning?

- Staff and students will wash their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds at the following times:
 - at the start of the day and before going home
 - after going to the washroom
 - before preparing food
 - before and after eating
 - after getting hands dirty
 - after wiping noses or handling dirty tissues
 - after coughing, sneezing, or blowing nose
 - after cleaning tasks (staff)
- Commonly touched surfaces, including desks, will be disinfected at least twice daily.

Will hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies be provided or should staff and students bring their own?

- Hand sanitizer, hand soap, and necessary cleaning supplies will be provided at the school. Hand sanitizing stations will also be set up at all school entrances.

Will there be additional cleaning and sanitization?

- Increased frequency of cleaning and sanitization, particularly high-touch surfaces and common/shared areas, will be required.
- Commonly touched surfaces will be disinfected frequently—at least twice daily.
- Ample hand-cleaning supplies will be available at all sinks in washroom and kitchen areas.

Who is going to clean the desks at the end of each day?

- Custodial staff will be responsible for cleaning and disinfecting at the school.

Are visitors and volunteers allowed in schools?

- Schools will minimize visitors and volunteers at school facilities. When their presence is necessary, visitors and volunteers must first self-screen, wear a mask, and adhere to physical distancing and hygiene practices in place for students and staff. Community use of schools will be suspended, with the exception of child care centres operating in schools.
- Independent schools with shared rental agreements will need to ensure that public health measures are followed if the owners of the buildings have utilized space that is also used by the school.

Health Concerns

If a student or staff member is living with someone who shows symptoms of a common cold or flu but has not tested positive for COVID-19, should the student or staff member stay home or is it okay to go to school?

- As long as the student or staff member is not symptomatic and has not been in contact with a positive case of COVID-19, they can attend school. As soon as a sick household member gets a positive test result, the student or staff member would become a close contact and would need to go home and isolate with their family.

What happens if there is a positive case identified in a school?

- Public health officials will lead the response if there is a positive case in a school. This will mean contacting those who would be considered close contacts and advising them of the need to self-isolate or self-monitor.
- Schools will clean and disinfect areas that public health deems required, and the space will not be used until it is determined to be safe.

- Information will be shared with parents in those schools when a case has been identified.
- Schools will be identified in the Manitoba COVID-19 Bulletin when a case has been identified.

Will they close my school if a positive case is identified?

- Not unless there is evidence of transmission across multiple cohorts.
- Public health measures that reduce the contact between groups of students will allow for individual classes or cohorts to be excluded from school and advised to self-isolate at home, instead of the entire school. Classes or cohorts that are not exposed can continue to attend school. If there is evidence of transmission between cohorts in the school, the school may be closed and switch to remote learning for a period of time.

Will teachers have access to fast-tracked COVID-19 testing?

- Currently there is no fast-tracking for any essential workers beyond health care.
- Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and should be tested for COVID-19. If the COVID-19 test result is negative, they should stay home until symptoms have resolved for 24 hours. If not tested, all individuals with symptoms should isolate at home for 10 days after symptom onset.
- If anyone is identified as a close contact to a case, they will be required to self-isolate for 14 days due to exposure, regardless of whether their COVID-19 test is negative.

If a student tests positive for COVID-19 in a class or cohort, would other students who have been in close contact not be allowed back to school for 14 days?

- There is no single answer to this question. Public health will take the circumstances of the individual situation into consideration and provide direction on a case-by-case basis. Public health will assess the amount of contact and risk of transmission to inform these decisions.

How can I talk to my child about COVID-19?

- Provide reassurance to children and youth about their personal safety and health. Telling children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting for them. Reassure them about their safety, and explain that there are many things they can do to stay healthy. Seek out credible resources and information.
- For more information on talking to children about COVID-19, please see the following resources provided by UNICEF and the World Health Organization:
 - UNICEF
www.unicef.org/coronavirus/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-covid-19-school-return
 - World Health Organization
www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/healthy-parenting/english-tip-6-covid-19-parenting.pdf?sfvrsn=232558c1_8

School Operations

Will there be recess?

- Yes. Lunch and recess breaks will be staggered.

Can students use playground equipment?

- Yes. Outdoor activities are encouraged and outdoor spaces and playground structures can be used.
- Public health indicates that playgrounds and play structures are low risk for transmission.
- Each class or cohort will have a separate container of equipment. The equipment will be cleaned between recess periods.
- Zones will be marked to manage group sizes and to minimize contact among groups.
- Contact sports and games, as well as the use of shared equipment, is strongly discouraged.

Will students eat lunch at school? Will there be cafeteria service?

- School divisions will determine whether non-bussed children will remain at school for lunch. Lunch and recess breaks will be staggered throughout the day and, whenever possible, students will remain together with their class or cohort during these breaks. Not all schools offer cafeteria service; for those that do, it will be a local decision whether or not they remain open.
- Students should bring their own lunches, or provided lunches must be individually wrapped in disposable containers. Schools can continue to offer breakfast and lunch programs with necessary adjustments to ensure health guidelines are in place. Schools will have no-sharing policies in place.

Will the library be open?

- Individual schools will make this determination, as this space may be needed as an instructional space to accommodate physical distancing of students.

Will there be sharing of books in the library?

- Schools are able to operate libraries. Schools will undertake increased frequency of cleaning and sanitization throughout the building, particularly where there are high-touch surfaces and common/shared areas.

Will students be sharing a locker with another student?

- Students are encouraged to keep personal belongings with them when they return to school. Depending on the school, locker use may be limited or discontinued.

Will students continue to play in group sports, such as on volleyball teams?

- Sports teams may continue as long as the school ensures they follow up-to-date information regarding Manitoba's *Restoring Safe Services Sports Guidelines* (see www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/sports-guidelines.html).

Student Achievement and Learning

Is student attendance at school mandatory?

- School attendance is mandatory for children aged 7 to 18 in Manitoba. All students are expected to participate fully in learning, even when remote learning is required.
- Division-level remote learning will be in place for students who have been medically advised not to return to in-class learning due to COVID-related risk factors.

Will students attend school five days per week?

- Students in Kindergarten through Grade 8, as well as those with special needs, will be in class full days, five days per week while we are in *Level 1: In-class learning response level* (see *Welcoming Our Students Back: Restoring Safe Schools* at www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/k-12-reopeningplan-stage-2.pdf).
- Grades 9 to 12 students will return for up to five days per week of classroom instruction if high schools can reduce the risk of transmission by effectively timetabling, implementing physical distancing measures and the use of cohorts, and supporting any contact tracing that may be required. The priority remains that students are to be ensured as much in-class learning as possible. When remote learning is required to meet public health orders, a minimum of two days of in-class learning in a six-day cycle is required.

If students stay home because they feel unwell, how will they receive their assignments?

- Classroom teachers will support the development and provision of at-home learning packages for students who are isolating or quarantined.

How will students keep learning if they must remain at home for an extended period and they do not have access to a computer?

- When remote learning is required, students will have access to learning resources, including technology, and connectivity issues will be addressed.
- A guiding principle of our planning is that every student will have consistent, reliable, and appropriate connection to school learning and belonging, regardless of location, barriers, special needs, or challenges. Students, parents, and caregivers will also have accessible resources and supports.

If parents are uncomfortable with the risk of having their children resume classroom learning, do they have the option of asking for virtual learning opportunities or extra tutoring resources?

- Virtual learning is not an option. Ensuring the safety, health, and well-being of all students, staff, and families has been a guiding principle in our planning, and public health has determined that it is safe to resume in-class learning while following public health guidance. This includes screening, enhanced hand hygiene, physical distancing, wearing a mask, the use of cohorts, and outbreak management, which are paramount in keeping as many students as possible in schools this fall and throughout the pandemic.
- Division-level remote learning will be in place for students **who are medically advised** not to return to in-class learning due to COVID-related risk factors.
- School staff and administrators will continue to support students in their return to in-class learning. Mental health and well-being are critical factors in returning to in-class learning plans. As such, regular check-ins and informal assessments will play an important role in supporting transitions.
- In Manitoba, parents or guardians may choose to homeschool their children. The Homeschooling Office within the Independent Education Unit of Manitoba Education administers homeschools and supports homeschooling families throughout the province. When parents choose to homeschool their child, they are responsible for obtaining resources and materials for the program of study. Provincial funding is not available to families who homeschool.

If you would like your child to enter or re-enter the school system, principals of public and funded independent K–12 schools are responsible for making grade-level placement decisions and for granting possible credits.

Information on homeschooling can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/schools/ind/homeschool/index.html.

Will there be gym class?

- Physical education will continue with necessary modifications for physical distancing. When possible, it is likely that this will occur outside.

Will there be music and choir?

- As there are no specific interventions that eliminate the risk from these group activities at this time, it is difficult to provide specific guidance for choral or for wind instruments. Schools may consider cancelling these activities for the upcoming year or, initially, for the fall term, as further evidence on their risk becomes available. If music programs continue, they must implement additional measures as recommended in *Guidelines for Vocalists and Instrumentalists* at www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/restoring-vocalists-instrumentalists.pdf.

Students with special needs will be in congregated classrooms. Isn't this a step backwards from the department's philosophy of inclusion?

- The goal is to have as many students back to in-class learning as possible, including students with special learning needs.
- School is going to be different for everyone this fall, including students with special needs—many of whom may not be able to stay home independently if parents are working.
- Grouping some students together and getting creative about programming and timetabling is a temporary COVID-19 measure that is intended to get kids back in school as much as possible.

How will schools help my child adjust to going back to school when it will look so different?

- Schools and school divisions have all planned strategies to respond to the mental health and well-being needs of their students, staff, and families, and they have posted plans on their websites so that you can access them.

Where can I get information on my specific school?

- Detailed school division plans are posted. This includes information on
 - the school-day structure and learning plan
 - how the school division will ensure that public health orders and guidance are followed
 - how the school division will address the mental health and well-being of the school community, including teachers, staff, students, and families
 - how information will be communicated to students, staff, and families
- Before the start of the school year, schools will communicate directly with parents and caregivers to provide them with information about the school year and about ongoing plans for instruction and supports.

Will there be as many electives offered in high school?

- Core curriculum and required courses will be prioritized for the return to classroom learning. Electives may be limited in some schools to accommodate physical distancing and scheduling.

Will there be Grade 12 provincial tests?

- Grade 12 provincial tests are scheduled to proceed as normal. Schools will be notified if the public health situation warrants a change to the provincial tests. In the event of cancellation, other forms of assessment will be used to determine students' marks.

For More Information

Where can I get more information?

- More information on Manitoba Education's COVID-19 response, including resources, planning documents, and frequently asked questions, can be found at *Latest COVID-19 Education News* at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html.
- You can also visit EngageMB at <https://engagemb.ca/welcoming-our-students-back-restoring-safe-schools> to ask questions. We'll share your question and the answer for others to see. Questions can also be answered privately if they are not appropriate for sharing.
- *My Learning at Home* is a resource to assist families to support their children in remote learning from home. It can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/mylearning/learningathome/index.html.
- Current information about COVID-19 in Manitoba can be found at www.manitoba.ca/covid19/.