RESTORING SAFE SCHOOLS

Toolkit and Guidance for COVID-19 in Schools
Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning/Manitoba Health
Updated: April 5, 2022

Introduction

Manitoba is shifting from public health orders to public health recommendations. While the measures that were implemented during the pandemic helped slow the spread of COVID-19 as well as maintain capacity in our health care system, these measures also had other significant impacts on our society, including schools and child care. Balancing the risk of COVID-19 with the need to resume activities and standard practices for our overall mental, spiritual, and physical well-being is needed.

As restrictions and guidance are starting to ease in Manitoba, health and safety measures remain a priority. Public health orders are shifting to standard processes used for all reported communicable diseases, including guidelines for isolation. COVID-19 is still circulating and continues to be monitored by public health who will provide guidance to schools and child care facilities. Contingency planning is ongoing in the event that changes are required. Schools need to be prepared for future scenarios that may require a re-introduction of public health orders or preventive measures when there is increased in-school transmission. The toolkit will continue to be updated to reflect new guidance to help Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools manage COVID-19 until they can transition fully to standard processes.

What’s New?

- New isolation recommendations replace public health orders.
- Schools will elevate concerns directly to their regional public health authority and to Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning through EDUCOVID19@gov.mb.ca.
- Provincial dashboards will be phased out by end of March.
- Public health will issue Community Notification Letters directly. Schools will provide copies of any notification letters issued by public health to EDUCOVID19@gov.mb.ca.
Toolkit for Managing COVID-19 in Schools

This toolkit has been developed in partnership with public health officials and education stakeholders, and continues to be updated to reflect new guidance until it transitions fully to standard processes.

The toolkit supports school officials in managing COVID-19 within the school setting while minimizing the disruption to student learning as much as possible.

This toolkit includes:

• Isolation and Testing Recommendations
• Sharing and Communicating Public Health Guidance
• School Approach to COVID-19 Activity

Appendices include:

• Resources for Parents and Caregivers of Children Attending School
• Community Notification Letter on Increased Transmission
• Rapid Antigen Test Distribution
• Moving to Remote Learning

NOTE: This document does not provide answers for all individual situations. Schools and school divisions need to consider how to best integrate this guidance within their local realities and specific situations, in consultation with their local regional health authority.

For the purposes of this document, the term ‘school officials’ refers to principals and/or their delegate.

Isolation and Testing Recommendations


If there are additional questions or concerns, consult a health care provider or call Health Links – Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257. Please see the appendix on resources for website information.

For Positive Cases

Public health continues to advise that Manitobans isolate when they test positive for COVID-19 or have symptoms of COVID-19. Isolation guidance applies to all individuals, regardless of vaccination status.

• Individuals with COVID-19 symptoms should stay home and isolate for five days after symptoms start, until they have no fever and other symptoms have improved over the past 24 hours.
• Individuals who have tested positive but do not develop COVID-19 symptoms should isolate for five days after the date of the test.
• Individuals should wear a well-fitted, well made mask for 10 days if they must have contact with other people while they are ill, from the onset of symptoms or their test date if they are asymptomatic.
• Individuals who have COVID-19 symptoms or test positive should avoid non-essential visits with higher-risk people and to higher-risk settings (such as personal care homes and congregate settings) for 10 days after the onset of their symptoms, or test date if asymptomatic.

For Close Contacts
Notification of close contacts is not required by public health officials, and close contacts generally are not required to self-isolate (quarantine). Household close contacts should self-monitor for symptoms.

• Staff and students exposed to COVID-19 in all settings may continue to attend school if they are asymptomatic regardless of their immunization status.
  If they develop symptoms, they should not come to school and are recommended to isolate and follow recommendations for cases. If they test negative, they can return to school when their symptoms have improved for 24 hours and they no longer have a fever. Please see guidance on rapid antigen testing (RAT) included in the FAQ section for repeating the RAT if you test negative on the RAT.
  https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/rat.html
• Individuals may notify their close contacts at their own discretion.

Please see the COVID-19 fact sheets for further information:
https://manitoba.ca/covid19/factsheets.html

Sharing and Communicating Public Health Guidance
Schools should have ongoing communication with families. School officials can share current public health guidance with the school community and to individuals who have self-reported cases.

School communication to families can include:
• Importance of daily symptom monitoring
• Status of absenteeism if high
• Classes identified with high COVID-19 transmission

School Approach to COVID-19 Activity

1. Monitor information on cases and absenteeism
   Parents/caregivers and staff should be encouraged to report cases to the school.
   School officials should also monitor student and staff absenteeism and COVID-19 cases to look for unusually high absenteeism or concerning patterns or trends in a classroom or school.

2. Report on absenteeism rates
   Schools can continue to inform school communities if there is higher than expected absenteeism within their schools due to COVID-19 activity. School officials should continue to emphasize the need for individuals to screen for COVID-19 symptoms and stay home when sick.
3. **Notify Public Health of absenteeism concerns**

School officials can continue to consult public health when they have concerns about reported cases and high absenteeism due to COVID-19 activity that exceeds what is expected.

School officials should consider factors that indicate that there may be increased transmission of respiratory disease in the school (e.g. significant reports of positive rapid antigen tests, high absenteeism, multiple cases in groups or cohorts have been recorded within the past 14 days, etc.).

When school officials have a concern about COVID-19 activity, they can escalate concerns to their regional public health authority directly through standard communication channels and Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning through EDUCOVID19@gov.mb.ca.

4. **Consult with public health officials**

As with any other communicable disease, public health will continue to work with schools or child care facilities when concerns arise.

If information collected by the school suggests increased in-school transmission above that expected, public health may recommend:

- Further preventive measures such as re-introducing mask recommendations and physical distancing, pausing extra-curricular activities, field trips and assemblies, and moving to low-risk activities during physical education and music classes.
- Further surveillance testing if new patterns of disease presentation or transmission are emerging.
- Communication to the school community with advice on monitoring for symptoms and isolating if sick. Based on the sample template, public health will issue community notification letters for schools to distribute as required.

Remote learning is a measure of last resort and is not anticipated to be recommended by public health for ongoing COVID-19 management, unless exceptional circumstances arise.

**Note:** For shifts to remote learning, schools must receive a risk assessment from public health officials and then approval from Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning through EDUCOVID19@gov.mb.ca.
Appendix One: Resources for Parents and Caregivers of Children Attending School

COVID-19 continues to circulate in Manitoba, and all students, staff and family members should be self-monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19 every day. The following resources are available to direct families to information on COVID-19. Schools will communicate with families during times when increased transmission of COVID-19 is occurring.

**Daily screening:**
Monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 every day. If a child develop symptoms, they should isolate (stay at home) and not attend school, child care, or work. If they have an exposure to COVID-19, check the online screening tool for instructions on what to do.

- Online screening tool [https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/](https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/)
- COVID-19 Screening Checklist [Covid-19 Generic Screening Checklist June 2021](https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/screening/tool/)

**If a child has symptoms:**
- They should isolate (stay at home) and notify the school.
  - Please see the COVID-19 fact sheets for further information: [https://manitoba.ca/covid19/factsheets.html](https://manitoba.ca/covid19/factsheets.html)
  - Guidance on Isolation: [Province of Manitoba | Self-Isolation](https://manitoba.ca/covid19/self-isolation/)
- See the testing website for information on rapid antigen tests below.
  - [Province of Manitoba | COVID-19 Testing](https://manitoba.ca/covid19/testing/)
  - Rapid Antigen Test Factsheet: [COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs)](https://manitoba.ca/covid19/rapid-ag-test/)
  - If eligible for PCR testing, you can register to view your laboratory-based test results online: [https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/test-results/](https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/test-results/)

**If parents or caregivers have questions or need advice:**
- The online screening tool provides guidance for many different scenarios and may answer those questions: [https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/](https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/).
- If there are further questions, please call Health Links – Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or toll-free at 1-888-315-9257.
Appendix Two:
Community Notification Letter on Increased Transmission

Sample letter from Public Health

Insert Date

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Re: School Community Notification of Increase in COVID-19 Activity—Insert Name of School

This notification is to advise the school community of increased COVID-19 cases and respiratory disease activity in Insert Classroom/Bus or other location (as applicable) within the past 14 days.

All students and staff in the school should self-monitor for symptoms, and avoid non-essential contact with individuals at higher risk of developing severe disease. Students can continue to attend school as long as they do not have symptoms of COVID-19 as listed below and they do not have a positive COVID-19 test.

The school will focus on preventive measures during this monitoring period to reduce the risk of further transmission. This may include postponing group and extra-curricular activities, and encouraging preventive measures such as physical distancing, mask use, and hand hygiene among students.

If your child develops a new onset or worsening of any one symptom listed in Column A or any two or more symptoms listed in Column B (see table below), even if they are mild, immediately isolate them from others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fever/Chills</td>
<td>Runny nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough</td>
<td>Muscle aches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sore throat/hoarse voice</td>
<td>Fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing</td>
<td>Pink eye (conjunctivitis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of taste or smell</td>
<td>Headache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting or diarrhea for more than 24 hours</td>
<td>Skin rash of unknown cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nausea or loss of appetite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor feeding (if an infant)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is recommended your child isolate as soon as symptoms appear. If you have access to rapid antigen tests for COVID-19, you may wish to use them. RATs may be accessed from community sites or from the school. If your child is symptomatic and tests negative on a RAT, please repeat the test the following day according to the guidance on rapid antigen testing at https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/rat.html. Additional tests are available through the school if required.

If you or your child are at high risk for severe disease, please visit https://manitoba.ca/covid19/testing/index.html to determine your eligibility for PCR testing. For access to testing, please visit https://manitoba.ca/covid19/testing/locations.html, or call Health Links-Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or toll-free at 1-888-315-9257.

Public health officials are also advising anyone with COVID-19 symptoms and who is not tested should assume they have COVID-19 and isolate.

Please note the following:
- Parents/caregivers are encouraged to notify the school if your child tests positive.
- The school is not permitted to release the name or any identifying information about any case(s) of COVID-19 to any member of the school, community, or media.

For more public health information about COVID-19, please visit https://manitoba.ca/covid19/updates/resources.html.

Sincerely,

Office of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer
Manitoba Health
Appendix Three: Rapid Antigen Test Distribution

Rapid antigen test (RAT) kits are available for distribution to the school community to allow students and staff to be tested at home for early detection of COVID-19 if they develop symptoms. This is supplementary to RAT kit distribution from other community sites.

Process

1. Rapid antigen testing kits have been shipped to school divisions, independent schools and First Nations schools.

2. School divisions and schools will handle parent communications and test distribution. Participation is voluntary. Instructions on how to perform the test are included in the kit.

3. Tests can be administered at home as soon as students or staff develop symptoms, and they should follow the kit instructions provided.

4. Additional tests can be ordered directly from Materials Distribution Agency (MDA), contingent on approval of the Testing Task Force.
Appendix Four: Moving to Remote Learning

Remote learning will be a measure of last resort. It is not anticipated to be recommended for ongoing COVID-19 management, unless exceptional circumstances arise. In such circumstances, the following process steps are required.

A shift to remote learning requires a risk assessment from public health officials and approval from Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning. Once assessed by public health, school officials are required to notify and receive approval from Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning through EDUCOVID19@gov.mb.ca.

1. Consult with public health officials:
Consult with your regional public health official (www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html) to complete a risk assessment. Public health will provide recommendations on preventive measures and determine whether any further action is necessary, including whether remote learning is recommended for specific classes or the school. School officials will document and discuss concerns related to self-reported cases, attendance, and any other concerns.

2. Consult with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning:
Connect with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning through EDUCOVID19@gov.mb.ca to advise of public health officials’ direction. If public health officials have directed a shift to remote learning, provide the following to Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning:

- the direction received from the public health official, along with their contact information
- the rationale for the shift to remote learning
- the length of time for the remote learning period with an anticipated return date, as recommended by public health
- accommodations made for children of critical service workers as well as high-risk students and those with special needs

If you have consulted with public health officials and they have not directed a shift to remote learning but there is an operational concern, consult on the situation with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning. Schools must receive confirmation from Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning before shifting to remote learning.
3. Document:

If public health officials have recommended a shift into remote learning, they will forward a letter to the school for community distribution. Schools will elevate concerns directly to their regional public health authority and to Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning through EDUCOVID19@gov.mb.ca.

If Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning has verified a shift for operational reasons, the school letter should provide a reason, the length of time, an anticipated return date, and any accommodation for children of critical service workers as well as high-risk students and those with special needs.

4. Prepare:

Make arrangements to accommodate children of critical services workers who cannot make alternative care arrangements, as well as high-risk students and those with special needs, if possible.

Please do not hesitate to contact Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning if you have any questions.

5. Return to in-person learning:

Make arrangements to return to school by the defined date set by the public health official or Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning. If there are ongoing concerns, connect with your regional public health official before returning to in-person learning. Ensure preventive measures are in place and avoid high-risk activities where there may be close contact to others.

Relevant web links include:

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning Standards for Remote Learning
www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/remote_learn_standards.pdf

Please forward questions and inquiries to EDUCOVID19@gov.mb.ca.

Additional information is available on the Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning COVID-19 website at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/.
Appendix Four (continued):
Initiate Remote Learning Letter
Sample letter from Public Health

Insert Date

Dear Parent/Guardian,

**Re: School Community Notification Letter of Remote Learning Period—Insert Name of School**

Increased numbers of COVID-19 cases and respiratory disease activity are present in Insert Classroom/Bus or other location (as applicable) within the past 14 days, requiring a shift to remote learning due to increased absenteeism among staff and students.

All individuals in this/these group(s) will be moved to remote learning on Insert Date, with return to school planned for Insert Date. You will be notified if there is any change on the return date.

All students and staff in the school should self-monitor for symptoms, and avoid non-essential contact with individuals at higher risk of developing severe disease.

The school will focus on preventive measures during this monitoring period to reduce the risk of further transmission for those not on remote learning. This may include postponing group and extra-curricular activities, and encouraging preventive measures such as physical distancing, mask use, and hand hygiene among students. You may notice some adjustments to their learning plans as a result.

If your child develops a new onset or worsening of any one symptom listed in Column A or any two or more symptoms listed in Column B (see table below), even if they are mild, immediately isolate them from others.

A  | B
---|---
Fever/Chills  | Runny nose
Cough  | Muscle aches
Sore throat/hoarse voice  | Fatigue
Shortness of breath/difficulty breathing  | Pink eye (conjunctivitis)
Loss of taste or smell  | Headache
Vomiting or diarrhea for more than 24 hours  | Skin rash of unknown cause
| Nausea or loss of appetite
| Poor feeding (if an infant)
If symptoms develop and you have access to rapid antigen tests (RATs) for COVID-19, you may wish to use them. RATs may be accessed from community sites or from the school. If your child is symptomatic and tests negative on the RAT, please repeat the test the following day according to the guidance on rapid antigen testing at https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/rat.html. Additional tests are available through the school if required.

If you or your child are at high risk for severe disease, please visit https://manitoba.ca/covid19/testing/index.html to determine your eligibility for PCR testing. For access to testing, please visit https://manitoba.ca/covid19/testing/locations.html, or call Health Links-Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or toll-free at 1-888-315-9257.

Public health officials are also advising anyone with COVID-19 symptoms and who is not tested should assume they have COVID-19 and isolate.

Please note the following:
• The school is not permitted to release the name or any identifying information about the confirmed case(s) of COVID-19 to any member of the school, community, or media.

For more public health information about COVID-19, please visit https://manitoba.ca/covid19/updates/resources.html.

Sincerely,

Office of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer
Manitoba Health