
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Education

K-12 operational guidelines set requirements for masks

VICTORIA – School districts have received updated operational guidelines to help ensure a consistent provincewide approach to keep schools safe for all students, teachers and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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.

Exceptions will be made for students who cannot wear masks for medical reasons. The guidelines also cover the key components of delivering K-12 education during the pandemic, including curriculum, report cards, supports for students with disabilities/diverse abilities, and finance and operations.

Even when wearing a mask, staff and students will still be required to maintain physical distance from people outside of their learning group. Efforts will be put in place to ensure there is not crowding, gathering or congregating of people from different learning groups in a school setting, even if non-medical masks are being worn. Schools will also ensure non-medical masks are available for staff if someone should become ill while at school.

In order to support staff and students to meet this expectation, the ministry is providing additional funding to school districts that will support the purchase of up to 1.5 million masks, enough for every public-school staff member and student to have at least two 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.

Other health and safety guidelines include:

- increased cleaning of high-contact surfaces like doorknobs, keyboards, desks and chairs;
- increased hand hygiene with all students, staff and visitors being required to clean their hands before boarding school buses and entering school buildings, before and after eating, using the washroom and using playground equipment; and
- school districts may also install transparent barriers for people who have more contact with others, such as front-desk staff, bus drivers or food services staff, where appropriate.

Another key health and safety measure is the establishment of learning groups. A learning group includes students and staff who remain together throughout the school quarter,

semester or year, which could be made up of a single class of students or multiple classes of students. Learning groups will sometimes join for activities like physical education or music, or they may be secondary students taking the same courses. More information on learning groups, including examples can be found online: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/covid-19-return-to-school>

The Province is providing an additional \$45.6 million to school districts for enhanced cleaning, handwashing stations, reusable masks and other safety measures.

The following expectations are also part of the guidelines for school boards and independent authorities as they finalize their back-to-school plans:

Mental health

- Regular monitoring and assessment will review how changes to the delivery of education impact mental and emotional well-being of students and staff.

Child care

- School districts are to work with on-site before- and after-school child care providers to support learning groups staying together where possible.

Inclusive education

- Students who require more support in school must have full-time, in-class instruction available without any delays.
- Students who need to stay at home because they are immunocompromised should have an at-home learning plan and be provided with an educational program by their school district.
- Education assistants should continue to support students and teachers, including if classes move to remote learning or online.
- Children and youth in care should have priority access to technology, child care, in-class instruction and additional supports.

Blended learning

- In some schools, it may not be possible to have people stay in their learning group or physically distance on a full-time basis.
- For these schools, districts are looking at a variety of options to maximize in-class learning for their students and, in some cases, they may need to offer a hybrid approach for their students with a blend of remote, online and self-directed learning.
- In these situations, schools should prioritize learning that can be effectively done remotely such as key literacy, numeracy and core competencies.
- Vulnerable students and those who require additional support in school should be prioritized for full-time, in-class learning.

Assessments

- Ensure activities, assignments and assessments are accessible to all students and families, as appropriate for any in-class, remote or blended (hybrid) learning.

- School districts must meet the requirements of British Columbia’s Student Reporting Policy, which allows significant flexibility for schools and school districts regarding the content and format of report cards.

Grad program

- In situations where in-class instruction is being supplemented with self-directed or remote learning, the focus should remain on ensuring students are making progress toward completing the graduation requirements.
- This may include further consideration of the flexible options available to students to satisfy graduation requirements, so students who are unable to participate fully in self-directed or remote learning are not disadvantaged.

Indigenous students and families

- Boards must ensure Indigenous rightsholders are engaged in meaningful consultation and school boards will need to work directly with First Nations to develop plans for any Indigenous students living on-reserve and attending public school.
- Boards must also work with Métis Nation for plans for Métis students attending public/independent schools.
- Boards are to identify Indigenous students whose educational outcomes may have been negatively impacted during in-class suspension, with support planned and prioritized.

Food and meal plans for students in need

- Services and supports to continue – including if in-class learning is suspended because of an increased risk of transmission or outbreak.

These guidelines were created in collaboration with all education partners, including teachers, parents, support staff, school leaders, trustees and Indigenous rightsholders.

School districts will communicate further details throughout the summer regarding schedules, learning groups and plans to parents, students and school staff, and will be posted online by the district by Aug. 26, 2020.

Learn More:

For more info on back-to-school plans, learning groups and health and safety guidelines visit: <https://gov.bc.ca/covid19returntoschool>

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