



## Guidelines for K-12 school settings

The Chief Medical Officer of Health in collaboration with the Department of Education has developed guidelines for K-12 school settings that will help teachers, administrative staff, students and families prepare for a safe return to school. The information provided below is subject to change as the local and national epidemiology of COVID-19 evolves.

### COVID-19 and children and youth

- The COVID-19 virus has a very low infection rate in children and youth. In larger jurisdictions, like British Columbia, less than 1% of tested children and youth have been COVID-19 positive. Most children and youth are not at high risk for COVID-19 infection.
- Children and youth typically have much milder symptoms of COVID-19 most often presenting with low-grade fever and a dry cough.
- There is no conclusive evidence that children who are symptomatic pose a risk to other children or to adults.
- Evidence indicates transmission involving children is primarily limited to household settings and from COVID-19 positive adults to children.
- Clusters and outbreaks involving children and youth are unusual and tend only to occur in areas where there are high levels of community spread.
- Children are not the primary drivers of COVID-19 spread in schools or in community settings.
- Schools and childcare facility closures have significant negative mental health and socioeconomic impacts on vulnerable children and youth.
- Prevention measures and mitigation strategies involving children and youth must be commensurate with risk.

## Public health measures and guidelines for schools

### Physical distancing

The current limits on social gatherings do not apply to school settings and school-related activities. There can be any number of students and staff in a school setting at any given time if they are not all in one area and can keep a safe distance of 2 metres from each. Physical distancing by and among staff is strongly recommended.

Physical distancing will not always be possible, particularly with younger students and students with special needs. Measures should be appropriate for a student's developmental stage and ensure optimal academic, social and emotional learning.

When physical distancing cannot be maintained, focus should be placed on minimizing physical contact and emphasizing other measures such as hand hygiene, enhanced cleaning and disinfection and staying home when sick.

- Students from the same household do not need to maintain physical distance from each other.
- Organize classrooms into smaller groups and/or spread students out to minimize direct physical contact.
  - Consider modifying classroom configurations (e.g. separating tables, placing student desks in a row) and locations (e.g. gymnasiums, cafeterias, and outdoors) that allow greater distance between students and staff.
- Groups of students should stay together throughout the day and not mix with other groups.
  - Staff should remain with the same group whenever possible and limit the number of student groups they interact with throughout the day.
- Manage flow of people in common areas especially smaller areas such as hallways.
- Consider staggering pick-up and drop-off times, recess, lunch and class transitions to support physical distancing.
- Close greetings such as hugs and handshakes should be avoided. Instead, encourage non-physical gestures such as “air fives”, waves or nods.
- Students should be regularly reminded to keep their hands to themselves.
- Help young students learn about physical distancing and less physical contact by creating games that promote safe spacing and include basic principles such as “two arm lengths apart”.
- Incorporate more individual activities or activities that encourage more space between students and staff.
- Adapt group activities to minimize physical contact and reduce shared items, when feasible and reasonable.
- If developmentally appropriate, remove toys that encourage group play in close proximity or increase the likelihood of physical contact. Keep toys that decrease the likelihood of physical contact.
- Close physical contact may be necessary (e.g. to comfort an upset student).
  - Hand washing and personal practices will help mitigate the risk associated with physical contact.

## Cleaning and disinfection

- Existing school cleaning and disinfection practices should be reviewed to determine where changes may be required, such as frequency and timing of cleaning and disinfection and staff training where needed.
- General cleaning and disinfection should occur once a day.
  - Disinfectants must be approved by Health Canada. For additional information, refer to the Yukon guidelines on [cleaning and disinfecting in the work place](#).
- High touch areas and equipment inside and outside of the classroom should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day.
  - This includes washrooms (toilet handles, faucets), light switches, doorknobs, handles, handrails, water fountain knobs, push buttons, tables, countertops, desks, chairs, keyboards, phones, touch screens and photocopiers.
  - Staff and students can clean and disinfect their own workspaces and high touch areas inside the classroom to reduce the burden on custodial resources.
  - Food contact surfaces including water fountains must be cleaned with a product safe for food surfaces, or immediately rinsed after disinfection.
- High touch areas in shared indoor spaces should be cleaned and disinfected between uses by different groups.
- Items that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected, such as area rugs, stuffed toys and soft furnishings, should be removed.
- If a student becomes sick while at school, all items touched or used by the student must be cleaned and disinfected.

## Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Thorough hand washing with plain soap and water for at least 20 seconds is most effective at reducing the spread of illness and least likely to cause harm if accidentally ingested. Antibacterial soap is not needed for COVID-19.
- Soap and water must be used when hands are visibly dirty.
- Alcohol based hand rub can be used if hands are visibly clean.
  - Technical grade ethanol should not be used as it is not approved by Health Canada for use with children or pregnant women.
- Portable, refillable bottles can be used, however only identical contents may be refilled into the bottles/containers.
  - Perform diligent hand hygiene and clean/disinfect bottles before refiling.
- Alcohol based hand rub should be made available at school entrances and exits, entry points to classrooms and other high traffic areas.
- Alcohol based hand rub should be safely stored out of the reach of young students.
- Students and young children in particular should be supervised when using alcohol based hand rub to prevent misuse.

- Staff and students should be provided with age-appropriate education in proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Posters or signage should be placed around the school. Examples include:
  - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/reduce-spread-covid-19-wash-your-hands.html>
  - [https://yukon.ca/sites/yukon.ca/files/hss/hss-imgs/hss\\_sign-handwashing\\_2020.pdf](https://yukon.ca/sites/yukon.ca/files/hss/hss-imgs/hss_sign-handwashing_2020.pdf)
- Students and staff are required to perform hand hygiene when entering and exiting the school as well as before entering the classroom. Additional hand hygiene practices should be performed at the following times:

When students should wash their hands	When staff should wash their hands
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before and after any transitions within the school setting (e.g. to another classroom, indoor-outdoor transitions)</li> <li>• Whenever hands are visibly dirty</li> <li>• After using the washroom</li> <li>• Before eating and drinking</li> <li>• After sneezing or coughing into hands</li> <li>• After playing outside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before and after any transitions within the school setting (e.g. to another classroom, indoor-outdoor transitions)</li> <li>• Whenever hands are visibly dirty</li> <li>• After using the washroom</li> <li>• Before eating and drinking</li> <li>• After sneezing or coughing into hands</li> <li>• Before handling food or assisting students with eating</li> <li>• After contact with body fluids (i.e., runny noses, spit, vomit, blood)</li> <li>• After cleaning tasks</li> <li>• After removing gloves</li> <li>• After handling garbage</li> </ul>

- Students and staff should cough and sneeze into their elbow, sleeve or a tissue.
  - Used tissues should be throw away and hand hygiene performed immediately.
  - Lined, no-touch wastebaskets (foot pedal-operated, hand sensor, open basket) should be used, where possible.
- Staff and students should have the supplies they need to conduct appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
  - Hand washing supplies should be well stocked at all times, including soap, paper towels and alcohol based hand rub.

## Teaching materials and objects

- Avoid sharing toys/objects between students as much as possible or if they do share, clean and disinfect after each use.
- Objects and materials brought from home by students should be cleaned with soap and water or disinfectant before use in the classroom.
- There is no evidence that textbooks, paper and other paper-based products transmit the COVID-19 virus. Books and paper-based educational resources can be distributed or shared with students.

## Meals and food handling

- Students and staff should observe proper hand hygiene before and after eating.
- Physical distancing should be maintained while students are eating.
- Where possible students should take their lunch in their classroom.
- Schools should have a “no food and drink sharing” policy.
  - Food from home should be stored with the students’ belongings and must not be shared with others.

## School cafeterias

- Students should keep a distance of two metres between each other as much as possible. Promote physical distancing by:
  - Reducing the number of students dining together at one time.
  - Removing/rearranging dining tables.
  - Placing tape or other markings on the cafeteria floors.
  - Staggering meal service times to reduce the number of students present at any one time.
  - Adapt other areas to serve as additional dining space to increase spacing among students in the same room.
- All staff who are handling food must practise diligent hand hygiene and a food safety certificate is recommended.
- Do not use buffets. Food should be served in individual portions or food items individually wrapped using single-use food grade packaging.
- Cutlery, napkins and other items should be provided to students, rather than allowing them to pickup their own items.

## Water fountains

- Consider having students fill water bottles rather than having them drink directly from the mouthpiece of a water fountain.
  - Non-touch or automatic water filling stations are ideal.

- If students refill their bottle using a water fountain with mouthpiece, encourage them to avoid touching the mouth of the water bottle to the fountain mouthpiece.
- Hand hygiene before and after using water fountains is recommended along with frequent cleaning and disinfection of water fountain high touch surfaces, hand and mouthpieces.

## Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is not recommended in school settings, beyond what is normally used by staff as a regular precaution for hazards encountered in the workplace.

Teachers and other staff may choose to wear a non-medical mask, however this is a personal choice.

- Wearing a non-medical mask is not an appropriate substitute for physical distancing or other control measures in a school setting.
- If worn, masks should be changed when visibly soiled, damp or damaged.
- If masks are worn or disposed of incorrectly, risk of infection can increase.
- For additional information refer to [Wearing a non-medical mask in Yukon](#).

Masks are not recommended for use by children unless advised to do so by a health care provider.

- In young children in particular, masks can be irritating and may lead to increased touching of the face and eyes.

Specific situations may require the use of PPE:

- A PPE kit should be available in case a student or staff becomes ill while at school (see appendix 1 for more information)
  - The kit should contain alcohol-based hand rub, disposable gloves and masks, for use by the ill
  - Individual and staff member attending to them.
- Custodial and teaching staff should follow routine processes when cleaning blood or body fluids.
  - High level disinfection is required e.g., 1:9 dilution or 5000ppm
  - Staff must wear disposable gloves and wash hands before wearing and after removing gloves.
- Staff members whose regular job duties mean physical distancing is not possible.
  - For example, when assisting students with activities of daily living.

# Student and Staff Safety

## What to do if a student or staff gets sick?

When staff and students return to Yukon's schools this fall some students and staff members may get sick and develop symptoms of COVID-19. Knowing the symptoms of COVID-19 and understanding what to do when students or staff experience them will help ensure a safe return to school.

Students and staff members will be asked to stay home when sick or displaying symptoms. Schools will be provided with procedures for responding to symptomatic staff and students. For more detailed guidance refer to appendix 1.

## Programming and activity guidelines

### Programming and services

The following programs and services have been identified as requiring program specific guidance. These programs and services should still observe the general public health guidance contained in this document.

#### Music, arts and drama

- Singing and playing woodwind and brass instruments must not occur at this time, as these activities increase the risk of spreading the virus due to aerosolized respiratory fluids.

#### Physical education class

- The risk of COVID-19 transmission is lower in outdoor settings than it is indoors. Wherever possible physical education classes should be held outside.
- Physical education classes should follow the contact sports and [sport and recreation](#) guidelines.

#### Recess/playgrounds

- The risk of COVID-19 transmission is lower in outdoor settings than it is indoors, as a result outdoor recess and breaks are encouraged.
- Whenever possible, schools should stagger recess and breaks to reduce mixing between groups.
- Students and staff members should practice hand hygiene before and after any recess or break period.
  - Students should wash their hands after using playground equipment

### **Cooking class**

- All students and staff should sanitize their hands prior to cooking and meal preparation.
- Kitchen workspaces should be reconfigured to ensure 2 metres physical distancing can be maintained.
- Where possible, staff members should eliminate the sharing of cooking equipment and instruments.
- Classroom surfaces, workstations, equipment, utensils and containers must be cleaned and disinfected between each class/use. See *Cleaning and disinfection* section for more information.

### **Outdoor/on the land education, field trips and overnight trips**

- The risk of COVID-19 transmission is lower in outdoor settings than it is indoors; as a result, outdoor education and on the land programming is encouraged.
- When physical distancing is not possible (e.g. sitting on a bus), students should be assigned a partner or seat that does not change for the duration of the trip.
- Schools should develop a plan if a student becomes symptomatic before or on an excursion or field trip.
- Field trips within Yukon and Canada are permitted if public health guidelines are followed. Guidance is based on the current epidemiology of COVID-19 and will be re-evaluated at the beginning of the school year.
  - Outdoor overnight trips are permitted if students sleep in their own tent or are partnered with a family member.
  - Hotel stays are permitted, with no more than two students per room.
- International field trips are not currently permitted.

### **Libraries**

- There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted via textbooks, paper or other paper-based products. There is no need to limit the distribution or sharing of books or paper based educational resources to students.
- Sign in logs should be maintained for members of the public accessing community libraries housed in schools.
  - Members of the public should be self-screening prior to entering a library housed in a school. Signs may be in place at the library entrance to remind the public to not enter if they are sick.

### **Computer labs and IT equipment**

- Computer workstations should be reconfigured to ensure 2 metres physical distancing between each workstation.



- Students should conduct proper hand hygiene before and after using shared IT equipment.
- Where possible, IT equipment should be cleaned between each use using disinfectant wipes containing 70% alcohol.
  - To facilitate cleaning, consider using covers that protect keyboards and other high touch areas on electronic devices.
- Refer to the Yukon guidelines on [cleaning and disinfecting in the work place](#).

## **User group and public access**

### **Public access**

- Educational specialists and consultants are permitted to enter the school if public health guidance is followed and movement within the building is limited as much as possible.
- All visitors, including educational specialists and consultants, must report to the front office upon entering the school.
  - Anyone who is ill or experiencing symptoms will not be permitted further entry.
  - A record of all visitors should be kept for a minimum of thirty days.
- All visitors should be reminded to practice diligent hand hygiene and maintain physical distance upon entering a school building.
- Visitors should use designated entrance and exit doors and limit their movement within the school as much as possible
- Stagger the timings of pick-up and drop-off if possible.
  - If there are multiple entrances, pick-up and drop off can be split at separate entrances to avoid parents gathering in large numbers.
  - Parents must wait for students in a designated area.

### **After school use**

- Public access for after school use should be permitted provided user groups follow the general guidelines contained in this document. These requirements should be communicated through an updated user group agreement.
- As much as possible user group access and movement throughout the school should be restricted. For example, adapting entrance and exit protocols, locking hallway doors, providing floor markings as appropriate.
- Cleaning and disinfection should take place between each user group.
  - To reduce the custodial burden consider having user groups use schools facilities less frequently for a longer period of time.
- User groups must have access to designated washrooms within the school.
- Groups renting school spaces are responsible for maintaining sign in logs should the need for contact tracing arise.

**For more information** on COVID-19 and the most update information on the Yukon situation visit [Yukon.ca/COVID-19](https://www.yukon.ca/COVID-19) or call COVID-19 InfoLine at **877-374-0425** between 7:30 a.m. and 8 p.m. seven days a week.

# Appendix 1

## What to do if a student or staff gets sick?

These protocols should be shared with school administrators, staff members, parents, guardians and students to provide clear expectations for what happens when a staff member or students gets sick.

## Staying home when sick

Parents and caregivers should assess their children for symptoms before sending them to school. All students and staff should stay home if they:

- have any symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19 or other infectious respiratory disease, OR
- travelled outside of British Columbia, Northwest Territories or Nunavut in the last 14 days, OR
- had close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 and have been directed to self-isolate by Yukon Communicable Disease Control.

Parents and caregivers should keep their children at home if they are displaying symptoms. To help assess symptoms, parents can use the [COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) or contact a health care provider for additional guidance.

Students can return to school when they are symptom free or if a health care provider has cleared them to return to school.

Staff should assess themselves daily for symptoms. Staff should stay home if they are experiencing symptoms until a health care provider has cleared them to return to school.

## What should students and staff members do if they are diagnosed with COVID-19?

Students and staff members that have been diagnosed with COVID-19 should self-isolate at home and follow the instructions of public health officials. After self-isolation is completed and on the advice of public health officials, students and staff members can return to school.

## What should you do when student or staff member shows symptoms of COVID-19 at school?

Responding quickly and calmly if a staff member or student develops symptoms of COVID-19 at school has the potential to reduce the transmission of the virus to other staff and students.

### **If a student develops symptoms of Covid-19**

Staff must take the following steps:

1. Immediately separate the symptomatic student from others in a designated, supervised area.
2. Contact the student's parent or caregiver to pick them up as soon as possible.
3. Where possible, maintain a distance of 2 metres from the ill student. If not possible, staff may wear a mask if available, or use a tissue to cover their nose and mouth.
4. Provide the student with a mask or tissues to cover their coughs or sneezes. Throw away used masks and tissues as soon as possible and perform hand hygiene.
5. Avoid touching the student's body fluids (e.g., mucous, saliva). If you do, thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water or disinfect with alcohol based hand rub.
6. Once the student is picked up, wash your hands with soap and water or disinfect with alcohol based hand rub.
7. Staff responsible for facility cleaning must clean and disinfect the space where the student was separated and any areas used by them.
8. All items the student touched/used while isolated must be cleaned and disinfected as soon as the student has been picked up.

### **If a staff member develops symptoms of Covid-19**

Staff should go home as soon as possible. If unable to leave immediately:

1. Symptomatic staff should separate themselves into an area away from others.
2. Maintain a distance of 2 metres from others.
3. Use a tissue or mask to cover their nose and mouth while they leave the school or wait to be picked up.
4. Staff responsible for facility cleaning must clean and disinfect the space where the staff member was separated and any areas used by them.
5. If concerned, staff should be encouraged to use the [COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#) or contact a family physician or nurse practitioner.

School administration is responsible for supplying the masks and cleaning materials necessary for safely responding to symptomatic students and staff members.

### **Monitoring absenteeism**

Reporting significant communicable diseases and high absenteeism rates is a responsibility of the Department of Education (as stated in the Agreement between Health and Social Services and Education, September 1st, 2010). Schools are requested to report absenteeism that is higher than expected (i.e. >5-10% above baseline), as determined by the school and that is thought to be due to a communicable disease. The existing reporting process and "[Yukon School Surveillance Reporting Tool](#)" should be completed. In addition to increased

absenteeism, this form may also be used to report a suspect or confirmed communicable disease of significance within a school setting, regardless of absenteeism.

Schools should monitor student absenteeism for extended absences as this may indicate that a student has COVID-19. Students returning from prolonged absences should be flagged for screening by administration upon their return and asked if they have any COVID-19 symptoms before returning to class.

### **What should students and staff members do if they are diagnosed with COVID-19?**

Should a COVID-19 positive person be identified significant efforts will be undertaken to determine if they are part of a cluster of cases or part of a local outbreak. Specific public health measures are implemented in facilities where an outbreak occurs to prevent further transmission of COVID-19 and keep others safe in a school or workplace.

Schools **should not** notify students, parents, caregivers and staff if someone is diagnosed with COVID-19. Information about any potential or confirmed cases should be treated as confidential. All necessary notifications will be done by Yukon Communicable Disease Control in conjunction with the Department of Education.