

17 September 2020

Dear School Administrators, Teachers, and Staff

Re: COVID-19 health & safety considerations for safe return to school

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration toward the health and safety of students and staff as you welcome them back to school. We draw your attention to a few important considerations and program updates.

1. Health & safety plans –The provincial [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings](#) has been updated and thus your COVID health and safety plans may need to be adjusted. Important updates include the following:

What if a student or staff develops symptoms at home or school?

Anyone with NEW symptoms of COVID-like illness that are not associated with a known chronic condition, such as allergies or asthma should stay home and monitor their illness for 24 hours. If symptoms develop at school, they should be isolated until they can be sent home. **Key symptoms to watch for are fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, loss of sense of smell or taste, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.**

Symptoms of COVID-19 can be mild and are similar to other respiratory infections. Most people with these symptoms do not have COVID-19.

- For mild symptoms without fever, students and staff can monitor at home for 24 hours and return if symptoms improve.
- If symptoms include fever OR if after 24 hours, mild symptoms remain unchanged or worsen, a health assessment is advised. The health assessment will determine whether a COVID-19 test is warranted. A doctor's note should not be required for a return to school.

Please note: Schools are not required to report suspected COVID-19 cases or absenteeism to local public health.

What will happen if there is a confirmed COVID-19 exposure at school?

If a staff or student is a confirmed case of COVID-19, public health will identify if they were at school during their infectious period, the period during which COVID-19 may be transmitted to other people. If public health determines that there was an exposure risk at school, we will notify the school administrator and work with them to provide further notification and recommended actions to exposed individuals or classrooms as required.

If there is a suspected or positive case of COVID-19, please do not notify staff, students or parents, unless directed to by public health. To maintain personal privacy rights, public health will not disclose if a student or a staff member is a confirmed case of COVID-19, unless information is required to support effective contact tracing.

2. Student and staff mental & physical well-being – During this time, we understand that many students and staff are feeling anxious and overwhelmed. To support a positive school experience, we encourage you to explore the provincial [Erase website](#) for a list of mental health resources for parents, caregivers, students and staff that are focused on building safe, caring and resilient school communities. Given the links between mental and physical health, we also encourage you to explore ways to integrate greater opportunities for movement during the school day, including the promotion of [active transportation to and from school](#), which also has infection prevention benefits.

3. Temporary changes to routine in-school health services –Due to the volume of work related to pandemic response and upcoming influenza campaign, there are a number of changes to delivery of health services in school. Hearing and vision screening for K students, and routine annual in-person staff training on managing emergency medical issues is on hold in many areas. Public health audiology clinics remain open and schools can refer students with hearing concerns to their local public health audiology clinic. On-line training will be organized for staff to support them in the management of emergency medical issues (anaphylaxis, seizures, diabetes and glucagon administration). If you have students with these conditions and your staff require the training, please connect with your local public health unit. In school immunization clinics are also delayed in many areas of VCH. Plans for future school-based services will be restarted in collaboration and communication with you.

In closing, we thank you for your attention to ensuring a safe and healthy school year. If you have any questions about the content of this letter, the programs and services we offer or you wish to discuss your COVID safety plans, please contact your local Medical Health Officer who is also your School Medical Officer.

For more information about COVID-19, please visit www.vch.ca or www.bccdc.ca.

Yours sincerely,



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