

RESTORING SAFE SCHOOLS

A Guide for Parents, Caregivers and Students



On September 7, 2021, schools reopened for full-time in class learning for all students with contingency plans in place.

Our planning for the school year focuses on renewal and addressing the impacts that the pandemic has had on mental health, well-being and learning.

We are committed to working with our public health and education partners to keep schools open for full-time in-class learning. Level of risk may change over the course of the year and schools will work with public health officials and Manitoba Education to implement any additional public health measures.

What's different from last year?

Cohorts and Physical Distancing	Cohorts are used for Kindergarten to Grade 6 to reduce potential exposure in students not yet eligible for vaccination. Schools will manage the flow of people in common areas.
Masks	Non-medical masks are required for all Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, staff, and visitors while indoors and while riding on a school bus, even when two metres (six feet) of distancing can be maintained. Mask breaks can occur when an individual is actively eating or drinking and for a brief time where there is physical distancing of two metres (six feet). Masks can be removed when outside. Masks may be removed when participating in physical activity.
Fundamentals	Staff and students continue to follow the fundamentals (self-screening, hand hygiene, and staying home when sick).
Bus Transportation	School transportation will return to pre-COVID policies and practices with some additional cleaning requirements. Assigned seating continues. Mask use is mandatory.
Extra-curricular activities and field trips	These follow public health guidance and orders in place at the time.
Music and band	Wind instruments and indoor singing are allowed, while ensuring adequate ventilation and encouraging physical distancing where possible.
Toys and Manipulatives	Sharing toys, manipulatives and shared play centres is permitted, provided good hand hygiene is practiced before and after use.
Libraries	School and classroom libraries are open for use. Ensure good hand hygiene before and after use.

Food Handling/ Service	Kitchens and cafeterias will be open. Only staff must handle food. Prepackaged snacks are preferred. Avoid overcrowding and practice good hand hygiene before and after. The use of microwaves is acceptable provided proper hand hygiene is followed before and after use. Microwaves must be cleaned in accordance with regular scheduled cleaning for high-touch surfaces.
Cleaning	Cleaning and disinfecting focus on high-touch surfaces and common areas. Washrooms are the exception, which require more frequent cleaning.
Ventilation	Maintain ventilation and ensure mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are working properly. Open windows when weather permits.
Visitors and Community Use of Schools	Visitors, volunteers and community use of schools will be permitted provided they adhere to public health recommendations and orders at the time.

Keeping schools safe and open

Get the vaccine: The best way to protect youth against COVID-19 is for them to receive both doses of an approved vaccine as soon as they are eligible. Health Canada approval for vaccinating younger children (ages 5 to 11) is expected in the very near future. Public health officials are planning to implement vaccinations for this age group once the vaccines have been approved.

Practice the fundamentals: Parents and guardians should continue to screen their child(ren) for COVID-19 symptoms before sending them to school. A self-screening tool is available at <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>.

Schools can require students and/or staff who are showing symptoms to stay home, encourage them to seek testing and follow public health recommendations and orders on testing. Schools will plan for students to learn from home when they are sick or symptomatic and required to stay home.

Good hand hygiene provides significant protection from many infections, including COVID-19. Students should be prepared to clean and/or sanitize their hands when they enter and exit the school and their classrooms. Good hand hygiene will also be practiced before and after activities, such as sharing toys, using common play stations and library visits.

Be optimistic but ready: Students can be reassured that Manitobans have made significant progress in slowing the spread of COVID-19. While current case numbers and vaccination rates are encouraging, cases may increase. There may also be a resurgence of other respiratory viruses with symptoms that resemble those of COVID-19. Schools have planned for these scenarios and are ready to implement additional public health measures if required.

Closing schools and shifting to remote learning will be a measure of last resort. Public health will identify regions or schools of concern or those with an outbreak. Schools will work with public health and Manitoba Education to implement the appropriate additional public health measures.

Talk about mental health and well-being: COVID-19 has impacted the mental health and wellness of many Manitoba students. In-class learning, peer contact and school celebrations have been disrupted for a generation of students.

Schools have a range of resources and supports that improve student well-being. The province continues to invest in existing and new programs and initiatives. Partnerships with community organizations and stakeholders like The Manitoba Teachers Society, the Canadian Mental Health Association, and the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth will continue.

Tip sheets and resources for student mental health and well-being are available as follows:

- Tips for students – www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/tips_students.pdf
- Tips for Parents and Caregivers – www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/tips_parents.pdf
- Tips for Teachers – www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/tips_teachers.pdf
- Resources for Youth and Adults – www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/tips_resources.pdf

More information on Manitoba Education’s COVID-19 response can be found at: <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/>.

The COVID 19 dashboard for Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools can be found at: <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/schools/index.html>.