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Restoring Safe Schools Parent/Guardian and Educator Frequently Asked Questions

UPDATE

On January 18, 2021, in-class learning will resume in Manitoba schools under the Restricted (Orange) response level of the Pandemic Response System.

Health Concerns

What should a person do if they show symptoms of COVID-19?

- Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and should be tested for COVID-19. If the test result is negative, they should stay home until symptoms have resolved for 24 hours. If not tested, all individuals with symptoms should isolate at home for 10 days after symptoms onset.
- If anyone is identified as a close contact to a case, they will be required to self-isolate for 14 days due to exposure, regardless of whether their COVID-19 test is negative.*

How long does a person need to isolate if they have a COVID-19 test that shows they have COVID-19?

- They must isolate for a minimum of 10 days following a positive COVID-19 test, and until their symptoms have resolved for 24 hours. Public health officials will notify them when they can come out of isolation.*

Can a teacher or educational assistant attend school if they are asymptomatic but a household member has symptoms of COVID-19?

- Yes, as long as they do not have symptoms, they wear a medical mask, and they follow all other public health guidelines.

* For more information, see www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/factsheet-isolation-selfmonitoring-recoveringhome.pdf.

If a student or staff member is living with someone who shows flu-like or COVID-19 symptoms but has not tested positive for COVID-19, should the student or staff member stay home or is it okay to go to school?

- While the community outside the school is in the Critical (Red) level under the Pandemic Response System, the whole household must self-isolate when one member of the household has symptoms. There is, however, an exception for children of essential workers, including those of school division staff members. They may attend the school as long as they do not have symptoms, they wear a medical mask, and they follow all other public health guidelines.
- If the community is not in the Critical (Red) response level, the student or staff member can attend school as long as the student or staff member is not symptomatic and has not been in contact with a positive case of COVID-19. As soon as a sick household member gets a positive COVID-19 test result, the student or staff member would become a close contact and would need to go home and isolate with their family.

If a person is symptomatic, how long must they be symptom-free before they can enter the school?

- The person can enter the school 24 hours after being symptom-free if they have a COVID-19 test and the result confirms that they do not have COVID-19. If the person chooses not to be tested, they should not return to school for 10 days after symptom onset.

What will happen if my child shows symptoms of COVID-19 at school?

- If your child develops symptoms at school, they will be isolated and you will be called. Please pick up your child promptly.
- If your child is symptomatic and needs to isolate, the fact sheet *Isolation for Individuals with Symptoms and/or Waiting for COVID-19 Test Results* is a helpful resource (see www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/factsheet-isolation-selfmonitoring-recoveringhome.pdf).

How long does a person need to self-isolate if they are identified as a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19?

- They must quarantine (self-isolate) for 14 days from their last contact with the case.* Public health officials will contact anyone identified as a close contact and provide further instructions.

What happens if there is a positive case identified in a school?

- Public health officials will lead the response if there is a positive case in a school. This will mean contacting those who would be considered close contacts and advising them of the need to self-isolate.

* For more information, see www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/factsheet-isolation-selfmonitoring-recoveringhome.pdf.

- Schools will clean and disinfect areas that public health deems required, and the space will not be used until it is determined to be safe.
- Information will be shared with parents in those schools when a case has been identified.
- The latest information for educators related to education during the pandemic can be found in the COVID-19 Education Bulletins on the Manitoba Education website at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/schools/index.html.

Will they close my school if a positive case is identified?

- Not unless there is evidence of transmission across multiple cohorts.
- Public health measures that reduce the contact between groups of students will allow for individual classes or cohorts to be excluded from school and advised to self-isolate at home, instead of the entire school. Classes or cohorts that are not exposed can continue to attend school. If there is evidence of transmission between cohorts in the school, the school may be closed and switch to remote learning for a period of time.

If a student tests positive for COVID-19 in a class or cohort, would other students in the class or cohort not be allowed back to school for 14 days?

- There is no single answer to this question. Public health officials will take the circumstances of the individual into consideration and provide direction on a case-by-case basis. Public health officials will assess the amount of contact and risk of transmission to inform these decisions.

How can I talk to my child about COVID-19?

- Provide reassurance to children and youth about their personal safety and health. Telling children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting for them. Reassure them about their safety, and explain that there are many things they can do to stay healthy. Seek out credible resources and information.
- For more information on talking to children about COVID-19, please see the following resources provided by UNICEF and the World Health Organization:
 - UNICEF
www.unicef.org/coronavirus/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-covid-19-school-return
 - World Health Organization
www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/healthy-parenting/english-tip-6-covid-19-parenting.pdf?sfvrsn=232558c1_8

Restricted Level (Orange)

Why are schools remaining in the Restricted (Orange) response level?

- Public health officials have found minimal school-level transmission among the K–12 schools with confirmed cases. Cohorts and other public health measures have been effective in mitigating the risk of transmission and informing contact tracing. While minimal transmission is occurring in schools at this point, additional public health measures are critical to ensure that schools respond to the current risks and conditions, given rising community transmission. If more measures are needed, they will be implemented.

Is my school moving to the Critical (Red) response level?

- Schools throughout the province moved to the Restricted (Orange) response level effective November 2, 2020, and are currently remaining there while the province in general is under the Critical (Red) response level. Public health officials may advise a school or school division to move to the Critical (Red) level if deemed necessary.

What measures are in place in my school under the Restricted (Orange) response level?

- The following preventative measures are in addition to the measures your school already has in place. If a measure is not listed below, it continues to be status quo as per the provincial Caution (Yellow) response level. It has not been rolled back.

Physical distancing measures:

- Schools must ensure two metres of physical distancing to the greatest extent possible and adjust classroom space as necessary. Excess furniture must be removed from classrooms to create additional space. Other spaces within schools must be repurposed to accommodate more distancing (e.g., multipurpose rooms, shared spaces, common areas, and libraries).

Masks:

- Teachers and staff who move across cohorts of students, including substitute teachers, are required to wear medical masks when two metres of physical distancing is not possible. Medical-grade disposable masks have been issued to all schools. N95 masks are not required.

Kindergarten to Grade 8 optional remote learning:

- Schools and school divisions may continue to offer optional remote learning to Kindergarten to Grade 8 students who can be supported while learning at home for the remainder of the 2020/2021 school year. Where this option is available and depending on school and school division planning, parents may be asked to commit to remote learning for the duration of the 2020/2021 school year.

Choir, band, and extracurricular activities:

- Indoor choir and the use of wind instruments are not permitted. This includes any instrument that requires the player to blow air into or across it (e.g., flute).
- All field trips must be postponed or cancelled.
- Extracurricular activities are only permitted if all learning and distancing requirements have been met. If these activities continue, established guidelines must be followed and, in the case of sports, participants should maintain distance when not active.

Can my child learn from home while the Restricted (Orange) response level is in effect?

- As outlined in the *Restoring Safe Schools* plan (see www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/k12-guidelines-sept2.pdf), all school divisions have been asked to deliver remote learning for students with medical accommodations, for students learning at home with supports from their classroom teacher when they are self-isolating, or for students who are in blended learning (between online and in-class) to meet physical distancing requirements where cohorts are not possible.

In January 2021, schools and school divisions may offer optional remote learning and depending on school and school division planning, parents may be asked to commit to remote learning for the remainder of the school year. The Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre has been designed to offer system-wide support for remote learning, and Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre teachers can be made available to support local schools if there are capacity issues.

Public Health Measures

How will students get to school?

- School buses will run for those students who are eligible for school bus transportation.
- Wherever possible, parents are encouraged to transport their own children to school.
- Schools will be implementing protocols to ensure that entry and exit from the school are managed to avoid congestion.

How far apart will students be sitting from one another on the bus?

- When possible, one student per seat is recommended; however, children from the same household and students in the same in-school cohorts may also sit together on the bus.
- Students will have assigned seats on the bus and must remain in those seats at all times while on the bus.

Are students, teachers, and staff required to wear a mask during all hours of the school day?

- Yes. Non-medical masks are required for students in Grades 4 to 12, teachers, staff, visitors, and volunteers when physical distancing of two metres is not possible. Parents and caregivers will continue to choose whether younger students wear a mask.
- There may be times throughout the day that students will have sufficient space to be physically distanced so that masks can be removed, such as during lunch breaks or mask-free play outdoors at recess.
- Specific guidelines on current mask use in schools can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/mask_guidance.pdf. Resources to help students, along with their parents and caregivers, learn how to safely put on, wear, and remove a mask are available at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html under the Public Health Measures tab.

Are teachers required to wear N95 masks in schools?

- No. N95 masks are used in health-care settings during aerosol-generating medical procedures and in certain situations when caring for individuals who have COVID-19. Medical masks can be used in schools.

Are students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 (K-3) required to wear masks?

- No. Masks will not be required for these grades, as it can be difficult for younger students to wear masks correctly for prolonged periods of time. However, K-3 students who wish to wear masks in school are encouraged to do so.

Does my child need to wear a mask on the school bus?

- Yes. Students, as well as bus drivers and, any other passengers, are required to wear non-medical masks on school buses. Masks should be put on before getting on the bus and taken off after exiting the bus. A mask will be provided for them if they do not have one.

Will the bus driver wear a mask?

- Yes. Drivers are also required to wear a mask.

What if my child loses their mask at school?

- Schools will provide masks to students and staff who need them.
- Schools will also have a supply of non-medical and medical masks on hand.

Does wearing a mask mean that other public health measures can be reduced?

- No. Wearing non-medical masks is an **additional layer of protection** that can help to prevent the infectious respiratory droplets of an unknowingly infected person (the wearer) from coming into contact with other people. This follows public health advice that a mask may be a helpful tool to reduce the risk of infection or transmission when an individual cannot be two metres from others.

Who should not wear masks?

- Non-medical masks should not be worn by anyone who
 - is unable to remove the mask without assistance (for example, due to age, ability, or developmental status)
 - is actively having breathing difficulties
 - is under two years of age

How do I request remote learning for a student when the student or caregiver is immunocompromised or has underlying medical conditions? Is a medical note required?

- Public health officials have advised that a medical note is not required when a student is requesting remote learning due to a physician-approved medical condition. Furthermore, children who are immunocompromised are likely already known to the school.
- In certain instances, school divisions and independent schools can request a medical note if needed. If a note is requested, school divisions/schools should use a form letter that the health care provider signs, that outlines the policy direction for COVID-19 risk factors, and that identifies that the health care provider can indicate that this situation applies to a particular student or immediate family member. Parental/caregiver contact information should be included on the form.
- Schools or divisions must follow up with each family by phone (or alternative method) to discuss and ensure that parents/caregivers understand what is involved with learning at home, and that this could be for the entire year until the spread of COVID-19 is broadly contained and a vaccine and/or effective treatment for COVID-19 is available.

Will in-school child care facilities require that masks be worn and/or will they operate at reduced capacity to allow for social distancing?

- Public health advice in *COVID-19 Early Learning and Child Care Practice Guidance* (September 2020) (see www.gov.mb.ca/fs/pubs/covid-19-elcc-practice-guide-updated-sept-2020.pdf) indicates that the use of non-medical masks within child care facilities is required for all school-age children in Grade 4 (aged 8/9) and higher, when physical distancing of two metres is not possible. Children in Grade 3 or under are not required to wear a non-medical mask while attending their child care facility. Parents/guardians may choose to have their younger child(ren) wear a mask, provided the child can wear it properly as per provincial guidance. Some exceptions to mandated mask wearing are listed in the above-mentioned document.
- Licensed child care centres, including facilities in schools, can continue to operate at full capacity, even if the total number of children (adding up all groups) exceeds the maximum under current public health orders for indoor and outdoor settings, provided at least four metres of space is maintained between groups. Home-based child care providers can also continue to operate with the number of children for which they are licensed.

- Schools will be asked to work cooperatively with child care centres to ensure that these centres can continue to operate.

Will my child's temperature be taken when they arrive at school?

- No. Parents and caregivers will need to screen their children before sending them to school.
- Schools may also support children with self-screening, but temperature checks at school are not recommended. Normal temperatures are different for everybody and can vary throughout the day.

Will smaller class sizes be implemented to allow for physical distancing, and, if so, will extra school space be converted to classrooms (e.g., gyms)?

- Schools and divisions will ensure physical distancing among students, teachers, and staff to the best extent possible, including through the use of alternative spaces like multi-purpose rooms if needed. Class sizes will not be capped, as public health advice does not warrant reducing the number of students to a specific number.

How far apart will students be sitting from one another at school?

- Public health officials recommend two metres of physical distancing. When this is not possible, students will remain within cohorts to reduce exposure to others. Cohorts will distance themselves at least four metres from other groups to limit exposure. In these instances, there must be at least one metre between students when seated at desks or tables.

Will there be special breaks for hand washing and desk cleaning?

- Staff and students will wash their hands frequently with soap and water for a minimum of 15 to 20 seconds at the following times:
 - at the start of the day and before going home
 - after going to the washroom
 - before preparing food
 - before and after eating
 - after getting hands dirty
 - after wiping noses or handling dirty tissues
 - after coughing, sneezing, or blowing nose
 - after cleaning tasks (staff)
- Commonly touched surfaces, including desks, will be disinfected at least twice daily.

Will hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies be provided or should staff and students bring their own?

- Hand sanitizer, hand soap, and necessary cleaning supplies will be provided at the school. Hand sanitizing stations will also be set up at all school entrances.

Will there be additional cleaning and sanitization?

- Increased frequency of cleaning and sanitization, particularly high-touch surfaces and common/shared areas, will be required.
- Commonly touched surfaces will be disinfected frequently—at least twice daily.
- Ample hand-cleaning supplies will be available at all sinks in washroom and kitchen areas.

Who is going to clean the desks at the end of each day?

- Custodial staff will be responsible for cleaning and disinfecting at the school.

Are visitors and volunteers allowed in schools?

- Schools will minimize visitors and volunteers at school facilities. Where possible, online communication, video, and telephone should be used to interact with families, rather than in person. When their presence is necessary, visitors and volunteers must first self-screen, wear a mask, and adhere to physical distancing and hygiene practices in place for students and staff. Community use of schools will be suspended, with the exception of child care centres operating in schools.
- Independent schools with shared rental agreements will need to ensure that public health measures are followed if the owners of the buildings have utilized space that is also used by the school.

School Operations

Will there be recess?

- Yes. Lunch and recess breaks will be staggered.

Can students use playground equipment?

- Yes. Playground use is permitted to all under the current health orders.
- Each class or cohort will have a separate container of equipment. The equipment will be cleaned between recess periods.
- Zones will be marked to manage group sizes and to minimize contact among groups.
- Contact sports and games, as well as the use of shared equipment, is strongly discouraged.

Will students eat lunch at school? Will there be cafeteria service?

- School divisions will determine whether non-bussed children will remain at school for lunch. Lunch and recess breaks will be staggered throughout the day and, whenever possible, students will remain together with their class or cohort during these breaks. Not all schools offer cafeteria service; for those that do, it will be a local decision whether or not they remain open.

- Students should bring their own lunches, or provided lunches must be individually wrapped in disposable containers. Schools can continue to offer breakfast and lunch programs with necessary adjustments to ensure health guidelines are in place. Schools will have no-sharing policies in place.

Will the library be open?

- Individual schools will make this determination, as this space may be needed as an instructional space to accommodate physical distancing of students.

Will there be sharing of books in the library?

- Schools are able to operate libraries. Schools will undertake increased frequency of cleaning and sanitization throughout the building, particularly where there are high-touch surfaces and common/shared areas.

Will students be sharing a locker with another student?

- Students are encouraged to keep personal belongings with them when they return to school. Depending on the school, locker use may be limited or discontinued.

Will students continue to play in group sports, such as on volleyball teams?

- In the province of Manitoba, all sports are suspended while under the Critical (Red) response level. This includes school sports. Schools may continue to offer physical education, provided all public health measures are followed including physical distancing. In addition, students in Grade 4 and higher must wear a mask while in the gym.

Student Achievement and Learning

Will curricular outcomes be reduced or eliminated this school year?

- It is expected that schools maintain instruction of mandated curricula of core subject areas. Unilateral program cuts will not be supported and school divisions must discuss these types of changes with Manitoba Education. Electives may be limited to accommodate scheduling if this does not affect educational requirements. Consideration may be given to offering some electives remotely or via distance for high school students.

Is student attendance at school mandatory?

- School attendance is mandatory for children aged 7 to 18 in Manitoba. All students are expected to participate fully in learning, even when remote learning is required.
- Division-level remote learning will be in place for students who have been medically advised not to return to in-class learning due to COVID-related risk factors.
- Optional remote learning may be available to students in Kindergarten to Grade 8.

If students stay home because they feel unwell, how will they receive their assignments?

- Classroom teachers will support the development and provision of at-home learning packages for students who are isolating or quarantined.

How will students keep learning if they must remain at home for an extended period and they do not have access to a computer?

- When remote learning is required, students will have access to learning resources, including technology, and connectivity issues will be addressed.
- A guiding principle of our planning is that every student will have consistent, reliable, and appropriate connection to school learning and belonging, regardless of location, barriers, special needs, or challenges. Students, parents, and caregivers will also have accessible resources and supports.

If parents are uncomfortable with the risk of having their children resume classroom learning, do they have the option of asking for virtual learning opportunities or extra tutoring resources?

- Ensuring the safety, health, and well-being of all students, staff, and families has been a guiding principle in our planning. This includes screening, enhanced hand hygiene, physical distancing, wearing a mask, the use of cohorts, and outbreak management.
- As outlined in the *Restoring Safe Schools* plan (see www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/k12-guidelines-sept2.pdf), all school divisions have been asked to deliver remote learning for students with medical accommodations, for students learning at home with supports from their classroom teacher when they are self-isolating, or for students who are in blended learning (between online and in-class) to meet physical distancing requirements where cohorts are not possible.
- While schools are in Restricted (Orange) level, school and school divisions may offer optional remote learning for students in Kindergarten to Grade 8. Depending on school and school division planning, parents may be asked to commit to remote learning for the remainder of the 2020/21 school year.
- In Manitoba, parents or guardians may choose to homeschool their children. The Homeschooling Office within the Independent Education Unit of Manitoba Education administers homeschools and supports homeschooling families throughout the province. When parents choose to homeschool their child, they are responsible for obtaining resources and materials for the program of study. Provincial funding is not available to families who homeschool.

If you would like your child to enter or re-enter the school system, principals of public and funded independent K-12 schools are responsible for making grade-level placement decisions and for granting possible credits.

Information on homeschooling can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/schools/ind/homeschool/index.html.



Parents/caregivers who are providing homeschooling may request support from a homeschool connector (a certified teacher). The homeschool connector, along with educational assistants, will support Kindergarten to Grade 8 homeschooled students and families by offering learning resources and providing regular check-ins. More information can be found at www.mbremotelearning.ca/.

Will there be gym class?

- Physical education will continue with necessary modifications for physical distancing. When possible, it is likely that this will occur outside.

Will there be music and choir?

- During Restricted (Orange) level, indoor choir and the use of wind instruments are not permitted.

Students with special needs will be in congregated classrooms. Isn't this a step backwards from the department's philosophy of inclusion?

- The goal is to have as many students back to in-class learning as possible, including students with special learning needs.
- School is different for everyone this year, including students with special needs—many of whom may not be able to stay home independently if parents are working.
- Grouping some students together and getting creative about programming and timetabling is a temporary COVID-19 measure that is intended to get students back in school as much as possible.

Where can I get information on my specific school?

- Detailed school division plans can be found online at <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/restoring/school-divisions.html>. The plans include information on
 - the school-day structure and learning plan
 - how the school division will ensure that public health orders and guidance are followed
 - how the school division will address the mental health and well-being of the school community, including teachers, staff, students, and families
 - how information will be communicated to students, staff, and families
- Schools will communicate directly and frequently with parents and caregivers to provide them with information about the school year and about ongoing plans for instruction and supports.

Will there be as many electives offered in high school?

- Core curriculum and required courses will be prioritized for the return to classroom learning. Electives may be limited in some schools to accommodate physical distancing and scheduling.

Will there be Grade 12 provincial tests?

- Grade 12 provincial tests for the January 2021 administration have been suspended. This will allow teachers to continue to focus on recovery learning, to adapt their classroom practices as the public health situation warrants, respond to mental health and well-being concerns of students, and help alleviate anxiety on the part of both teachers and students. A decision regarding the May/June 2021 administration of the Grade 12 provincial tests will be communicated in February 2021.

For More Information

Where can I get more information?

- More information on Manitoba Education's COVID-19 response, including resources, planning documents, and frequently asked questions, can be found at *Latest COVID-19 Education News* at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html.
- *My Learning at Home* is a resource to assist families to support their children in remote learning from home. It can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/mylearning/learningathome/index.html.
- *Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre* portal provides information on the services offered by the centre. The portal can be accessed at www.mbremotelearning.ca/.
- Current information about COVID-19 in Manitoba can be found at www.manitoba.ca/covid19/.