

Education (K-12): Protocols for returning to operation

The following content was posted to WorkSafeBC's website on August 28, 2020. For the most current version, please visit [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

These protocols are for K-12 education providers and include guidance and protocols for teachers, contractors, bus drivers, and others. These employers may also benefit from reviewing protocols related to office space.

This information is based on the BC Centre for Disease Control's COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings (updated July 29, 2020). Additional information is also available at B.C.'s Back to School Plan.

Developing a COVID-19 safety plan

Employers are required to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Employers must involve frontline workers, joint health and safety committees, and supervisors in identifying protocols for their workplace.

The COVID-19 Safety Plan follows the six steps outlined on COVID-19 and returning to safe operation. You can also refer to the COVID-19 Safety Plan OHS Guideline for information about developing a safety plan, including the level of detail required and use of supporting documentation.

Employers are not required to submit plans to WorkSafeBC for approval, but in accordance with the order of the provincial health officer, this **plan must be posted** at the worksite and on their website, if they have one. During a WorkSafeBC inspection, we will ask employers about the steps they have taken to protect their workers or to see the plan if it has been developed.

One part of developing your COVID-19 Safety Plan is identifying protocols that everyone at the workplace must follow to keep workers safe. We've provided industry-specific protocols below to consider as you develop the plan for your workplace.

These protocols are not a list of requirements; however, they should be considered and implemented to the extent that they address the risks your workplace. You may need to identify and implement additional protocols if the protocols suggested here do not sufficiently address the risk to your workers.

Understanding the risk

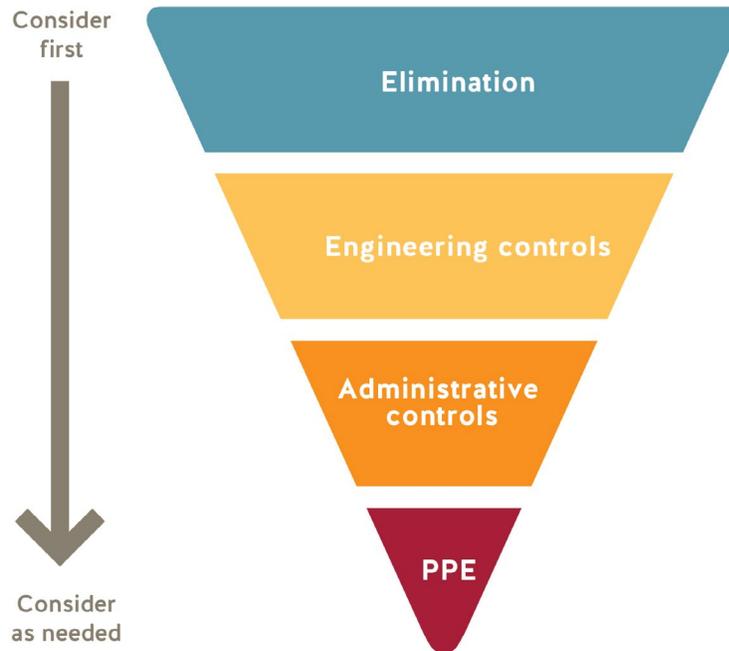
The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads in several ways, including through droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, and from touching a contaminated surface before touching the face. Higher risk situations require adequate protocols to address the risk.

- The risk of person-to-person transmission is increased the closer you come to other people, the amount of time you spend near them, and the number of people you come near. Physical distancing measures help mitigate this risk.

- The risk of surface transmission is increased when many people contact same surface, and when those contacts happen in short intervals of time. Effective cleaning and hygiene practices help mitigate this risk.

Selecting protocols for your workplace

Note that different protocols offer different protection. Wherever possible, use the protocols that offer the highest level of protection and add additional protocols as required.



First level protection (elimination): Use policies and procedures to keep people at a safe physical distance from one another. Limit the number of people in your workplace at any one time, and implement protocols to keep workers at least 2 metres from other workers, customers, and members of the public.

Second level protection (engineering controls): If you can't always maintain physical distancing, install barriers such as plexiglass to separate people.

Third level protection (administrative controls): Establish rules and guidelines, such as cleaning protocols, telling workers to not share tools, or implementing one-way doors or walkways.

Fourth level protection (PPE): If the first three levels of protection aren't enough to control the risk, consider the use of masks. Ensure masks are selected and cared for appropriately and that workers are using masks correctly.

Protocols for K-12 education

Restricting access to the school

- All workers and students who have symptoms of COVID-19 or have travelled outside Canada in the last 14 days or have been identified by public health as a close contact of a confirmed case or outbreak must stay home and self-isolate in accordance with guidance from the BC Centre for Disease Control.
 - » Workers and students may still attend school if a member of their household has cold, influenza, or COVID-19-like symptoms, provided the worker/student is asymptomatic. It is expected the symptomatic household member is seeking assessment by a health care provider.
 - » Workers and students who experience seasonal allergies or other COVID-19-like symptoms which are related to an existing condition can continue to attend school when they are experiencing these symptoms as normal. If they experience any change in symptoms they should seek assessment by a health care provider.
- Clearly communicate with parents and caregivers their responsibility to assess their children daily before sending them to school. Alternatively, conduct a daily health check at drop-off by asking parents and caregivers to confirm their child does not have symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other respiratory disease. The BC Centre for Disease Control has provided this Daily Health Check Example tool that can be used for parents and caregivers to complete prior to their child coming to school. This may be adapted if used for school staff and visitors.
- Parents and caregivers must assess their child daily for symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease before sending them to school. If a student develops symptoms while at home, parents or caregivers must keep their child at home until they have been assessed by a health care provider to exclude COVID-19 or other infectious diseases, and their symptoms have resolved.
- Develop a procedure for workers to follow to have a student picked up by their parent or caregiver as soon as possible, should they develop symptoms associated with COVID-19 infection while in care. Apply physical distancing, respiratory etiquette, and hand hygiene principles while waiting for pick up. Contact 811 or the local public health unit to notify them of a potential case and seek further input. For additional information and guidance in developing this procedure, refer to COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings.
- Schools and school districts should work with their school medical health officer to ensure policies and procedures are in place regarding reporting elevated staff and student absenteeism due to influenza-like illness to public health/the school medical health officer.
- Schools should not provide notification to staff or students' families if a staff member or student becomes ill at home or at school, including if they display symptoms of COVID-19, unless directed to by public health.
- Consider having parents and caregivers provide a copy of a completed daily health check form that confirms they understand how to complete the daily health check and that it must be completed daily.
- It may be necessary to reduce the number of individuals within secondary schools at any given time to ensure that physical distance can be maintained. Secondary schools should prioritize the attendance of students who most benefit from in-person support and learners with diverse needs, as well as consider alternative learning modalities and off-campus learning.

- Visitors entering the school should be prioritized to those supporting activities that are of benefit to student learning and wellbeing.
- All visitors should confirm they have completed the requirements of a daily health check before entering.
- Schools should keep a list of the date, names, and contact information for all visitors who enter the school.

Administration areas

- Limit the public coming into the office. Encourage parents and others to call instead of visiting the school.
- Designate a 2 metre area in front of or behind a kiosk. Consider the use of tape or other floor markers to designate where people can stand and line up (if required).
- Plexiglass may be used to separate administrative workers from the public if two metres of separation cannot be maintained.

Student management and hygiene

Hygiene

- Develop policies around when students should wash their hands. This should include, at minimum:
 - » When they arrive at school and before they go home
 - » Before eating and drinking
 - » After using the toilet
 - » After sneezing or coughing into hands or tissue
 - » Whenever hands are visibly dirty
 - » When moving between different learning environments (e.g., outdoor-indoor transitions, from the gym to the classroom).
- Workers should assist younger students with hand hygiene as needed.
- If a sink is not available use alcohol based hand sanitizer. Antiseptic agents are to be used as a last line of defense only.
- Food should not be shared by students.
- Encourage students and staff to not touch their faces.
- There is no need to limit the distribution or sharing of books or paper based educational resources to students. Laminated paper-based products should be cleaned and disinfected daily if they are touched by multiple people.

Physical distancing

- Parents and caregivers should remain outside of the school to drop off their children.
- Avoid close greetings like hugs or handshakes and remind students to keep their hands to themselves when possible.
- Consider using educational videos and online programs as a part of learning so young students can sit independently and distanced from each other.
- Consider teaching classes outside when practicable.

- Incorporate more individual activities or activities that encourage more space between students and staff. For younger students, adapt group activities to minimize physical contact and reduce shared items. For adolescent students, minimize group activities and avoid activities that require physical contact.
- Organize students into smaller groups that stay together throughout the day.
- Strive to minimize the number of different teacher(s) and educational assistant(s) that interact with groups of students throughout the day.
- Consider different classroom configurations to maintain distance between students or different locations in the school (e.g., different classrooms, gym or library, outside).
- Discourage any food or drink sharing.
- Stagger recess/snack, lunch, and class transition times to provide a greater amount of space for everyone.
- Ensure appropriate hand hygiene practices before and after outdoor play.
- Extracurricular activities including sports, arts, or special interest clubs can occur if physical distance can be maintained between members of different cohorts and reduced physical contact is practiced by those within the same cohort.
- Inter-school events including competitions, tournaments and festivals, should not occur at this time.

Cohorts

- A cohort is a group of students and staff who remain together throughout a school term. Cohorts reduce the number of in-person, close interactions a person has in school without requiring physical distancing to consistently be practiced.
 - » In elementary and middle schools, a cohort can be composed of up to 60 people.
 - » In secondary schools, a cohort can be composed of up to 120 people.
 - » Cohorts can be composed of students and staff.
- School administrators should determine the composition of the cohorts. The composition of the cohort should remain consistent for all activities that occur in schools, including but not limited to learning and breaks (lunch, recess, classroom changes, etc.).
- Within the cohort, minimized physical contact should be encouraged but a 2 metre physical distance does not need to be maintained.
- Cohort composition can be changed at the start of a new quarter, semester or term in the school year. Outside of these, composition should be changed as minimally as possible, except where required to support optimal school functioning. This may include learning, operational, or student health and safety considerations.
- Consistent seating arrangements are encouraged within cohorts where practical.
- School administrators should keep up-to-date lists of all members of a cohort to share with public health should contact tracing need to occur.
- During break times (e.g., recess, lunch), students may want to socialize with peers in different cohorts:
 - » In elementary schools, students can socialize with peers in different cohorts if they are outdoors and can minimize physical contact or if they are indoors and can maintain physical distance.

- » In middle and secondary schools, students can socialize with peers in different cohorts if they can maintain physical distance. Students must maintain physical distance when socializing with peers in different cohorts.
- Students from different cohorts may be required to be together to receive beneficial social supports, programs, or services (e.g., meal programs, after school clubs, etc.). Within these supports or services, it is expected that cohorts and physical distance are maintained as much possible while still ensuring the support, program, or service continues. This does not apply to extracurricular activities where physical distance between cohorts must be maintained.

Use of masks

- Schools must follow requirements and guidance on the use of masks laid out by the BC Centre of Disease Control's COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings and B.C.'s Back to School Plan.

Students with medical complexity, immune suppression and/or receiving delegated care

- Managing students with medical complexities, immune suppression, or who are receiving delegated care may require those providing health services (e.g., staff providing delegated care or other health care providers) to be in close physical proximity or in physical contact with a medically complex or immune suppressed student for an extended period of time. In community-based clinical settings where there is low incidence and prevalence of COVID-19, additional PPE over and above that required for routine practices is not required. The same guidance is applicable to those providing health services in schools.
- If a person providing health services determines the need for additional PPE following a point-of-care risk assessment, it should be worn. Those providing health services should wear a mask when working in close proximity with students who are at a higher risk of severe illness due to COVID-19 (e.g., children with immune suppression), particularly those who work at multiple sites.
- Those providing health services in schools may be receiving different guidance related to PPE from their regulatory college or employer. They are encouraged to work with those organizations directly to confirm what PPE is recommended for the services they provide in school settings.
- No health services should be provided to a student in school who is exhibiting any symptoms of COVID-19 (beyond those detailed if a student develops symptoms at school in BC CDC guidelines).
- Parents and caregivers of children who are considered at higher risk of severe illness due to COVID-19 are encouraged to consult with their health care provider to determine their child's level of risk.

Safety for staff

Physical distancing

- Establish and post occupancy limits for shared spaces such as lunch rooms and break rooms. Consider removing chairs or tables to ensure occupancy limits are not exceeded. If possible, provide additional areas for workers to have their breaks, including outside areas if available.
- Stagger start and end of shift times as well as break times for workers to prevent crowding when entering and leaving the workplace.
- Maintain 2 metre physical distancing whenever possible between workers and students. Consider the use of virtual meetings or other means to reduce the number of staff onsite. Modify work processes and practices to encourage physical distancing between staff and student, and other workers.

- Provide instructions to workers on methods for maintaining physical distance such as not greeting others by hugging or shaking hands.
- If workers need to meet in person, ensure there is a 2 metre space between each worker.
- Manage the flow of people in public spaces such as hallways and on stairs, consider the use of one-way systems. Use floor markings and posters to address traffic flow throughout the school. This may include one-way hallways and designated entrance and exit doors. It is important not to reduce the number of exits and ensure the fire code is adhered to.
- School gatherings should occur within the cohort. Gatherings should not exceed the maximum cohort size in the setting, plus the minimum number of additional people required (e.g., school staff, visitors, etc.) to meet the gathering's purpose and intended outcome. These gatherings should happen minimally and schools should seek virtual alternatives for larger gatherings and assemblies where practicable.
- If staff need to travel between worksites, maintain physical distance in vehicles wherever possible. Consider separate vehicles if possible. Larger vehicles may be able to accommodate physical distancing by using a seat configuration that maximizes distance between people.
- Barriers can be installed in places where physical distance cannot regularly be maintained and a person is interacting with numerous individuals outside of a cohort. This may include the front reception desk where visitors check in or in the cafeteria where food is distributed.

Hygiene

- Ensure hand washing supplies are available at all times (i.e., soap, clean towels, paper towels and, if needed, 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer). See the List of Hand Sanitizers Authorized by Health Canada for products that have met Health Canada's requirements and are authorized for sale in Canada.
- Develop and establish handwashing policies and procedures for all staff and others at the school. WorkSafeBC handwashing signage is provided to communicate good handwashing practices. Post handwashing signs near all sinks. Workers, including teachers, administrators and support workers should wash their hands frequently to reduce the risk of transmission.
- Ensure workers are provided with appropriate supplies and facilities with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes. Hand hygiene stations should be set up at the school entrance and other locations as appropriate.
- Consider the maximum number of workers and students required to wash their hands at peak times and ensure that sufficient hand washing or sanitizing stations are available for these times.
- Promote effective hygiene practices. Refer to WorkSafeBC's hygiene practices signage.

Use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Where PPE has been identified for tasks prior to COVID-19 pandemic, continue to use this PPE when performing these tasks.
- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids (e.g., runny nose, vomit, stool, urine). Wash hands before wearing and after removing gloves.
- Schools must follow requirements and guidance on the use of masks laid out by the BC Centre of Disease Control's COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings and B.C.'s Back to School Plan.

Interacting with cohorts

- Schools should minimize the number of adults (staff and others) who interact with cohorts they are not a part of as much as is practical to do so while supporting learning and a positive, healthy, and safe environment.
- Those outside of a cohort must practice physical distance when interacting with the cohort. For example, a secondary school teacher can teach multiple cohorts but should maintain physical distance from students and other staff as much as possible. In an elementary or secondary school, two classes from different cohorts can be in the same learning space at the same time if a 2 metre distance can be maintained between people from different cohorts.
- Unless they are part of the same cohort, staff and other adults should maintain physical distance from each other at all times. This includes during break times and in meetings.

Cleaning and sanitizing

- Schools should be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with the BC Centre for Disease Control's Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings and COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings and B.C.'s Back to School Plan.
- Establish a cleaning and disinfection procedure:
 - » General cleaning and disinfecting of the premises should occur at least once every 24 hours. This includes items that only a single student uses, like an individual desk or locker.
 - » Cleaning and disinfecting of frequently-touched surfaces should occur at least twice every 24 hours. These include door knobs, light switches, toilet handles, tables, desks and chairs used by multiple students, keyboards and toys.
 - » Clean and disinfect any surface that is visibly dirty.
- Empty your garbage containers often (at least daily).
- Provide adequate instruction, training, and supplies to custodians on the cleaning protocols developed for the workplace.
- Clean and disinfect any surface that is visibly dirty and limit frequently-touched items that are not easily cleaned. Use common, commercially-available detergents and disinfectant products and closely follow the instructions on the label. See Health Canada's list of hard-surface disinfectants for use against COVID-19 for specific brands and disinfectant products.

Buses and school transportation

- Clean and disinfect the high touch areas of the bus at the start of your shift and after drop offs. Buses used for transporting students should be cleaned and disinfected according the guidance provided in the BC CDC's Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings document. Additional guidance is available from Transport Canada.
- Encouraging private vehicle use where possible to decrease transportation density.
- Have students sit in their own seat wherever possible, students from the same household can share seats if space is limited.
- Bus drivers should clean their hands often, including before and after completing trips. They are encouraged to regularly use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol during trips, as well as wear a non-medical mask or face covering when they cannot physically distance or stay behind a physical barrier in the course of their duties.

- Students should clean their hands before they leave home to take the bus, when they leave school prior to taking the bus, and when they get home.
- Where possible, students should sit next to the window.
- Consider the order students typically load and unload to support buses being loaded from back to front and unloaded from front to back.
- Middle and secondary students should wear non-medical masks or face coverings. These should be put on before loading and taken off after unloading.
- Schools/school districts should keep up-to-date passenger lists to share with public health should contact tracing need to occur.

Food services

- Schools can continue to include food preparation as part of learning and provide food services, including for sale and meal programs.
 - » If food is prepared as part of learning and is consumed by the student(s) who prepared it, no additional measures beyond those articulated in this document and normal food safety measures and requirements need to be implemented (e.g., Foodsafe trained staff, a food safety plan, etc.).
 - » If food is prepared within or outside a school for consumption by people other than those that prepared it (including for sale), it is expected that the WorkSafeBC Restaurants, cafes, pubs, and nightclubs: Protocols for returning to operation are implemented as appropriate and as relevant to the school setting, in addition to normally implemented food safety measures and requirements (e.g., Foodsafe trained staff, a food safety plan, etc.).
- Schools should not allow homemade food items to be made available to other students at this time (e.g., birthday treats, bake sale items).
- The June 19, 2020 Order of the Provincial health Officer Food Service Establishments and Liquor Services does not apply to schools. Food Safety Legislation and the Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in B.C. Schools continue to apply as relevant.
- Schools should continue to emphasize that food and beverages should not be shared.

Communication strategies

- Remind staff that all health and safety measures in place prior to the pandemic are still in place.
- Attempt to mitigate staff confusion and concerns by communicating essential health and safety information to them in writing before they return to the workplace. If possible, give staff an appropriate amount of time to review this material, and to respond with questions.
- Upon first return to the workplace, hold a health and safety meeting to review workplace practices relating to COVID-19 and other health and safety matters. Additional communication may be required as new information is made available that may affect work practices.
- Daily check-in meeting with workers to provide them with new information and review any concerns.
- Ensure that parents and caregivers understand your policy that students must stay home if they are sick.
- Minimize the number of non-essential people coming into the school such as parents and caregivers and contractors.

- Keep parents and caregivers informed about what you are doing in your educational setting regarding taking extra precautions.
- Ensure that workers know how to raise safety concerns. This may be through your joint health and safety committee.
- Establishing a central location where new information is posted relating to COVID-19 in your workplace.

Documentation and training

- Train your workers on:
 - » The risk of exposure to COVID-19 and the signs and symptoms of the disease.
 - » Safe work procedures or instruction to be followed, including hand washing and cough/sneeze etiquette.
 - » How to report an exposure to or symptoms of COVID-19.
 - » Changes you've made to work policies, practices, and procedures due to the COVID-19 pandemic and keep records of that training.
 - » Document COVID-19 related meetings and post minutes at a central location.
- Keep records of instruction and training provided to workers regarding COVID-19, as well as reports of exposure and first aid records.

Safety responsibilities by role

Employer (school district)

- Select, implement, and document risk assessments and appropriate site-specific control measures.
- Ensure that all resources (information, authorization administrative changes, technology, training, human resources) and materials (personal protective equipment, equipment, cleaning and disinfecting products and systems) required to implement and maintain plan are reasonably made available as practical when required.
- Ensure that supervisors and workers are informed about the content of safety policies.
- Conduct a periodic review the effectiveness of the plan. This includes a review of the available control technologies to ensure that these are selected and used when practical.
- Maintain records of training and inspections.
- Re-examine all tasks in the workplace, especially those that require the direct care of students, and ensure that safe work procedures are updated with COVID-19 practices.
- Where possible, have workers perform only essential tasks to maintain the student's education and well-being. Tasks that are non-essential should be put on hold until directed otherwise by the provincial health officer.

Supervisors (principals and vice principals)

- Ensure that workers are knowledgeable regarding the controls required to minimize their risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Direct work in a manner that eliminates or minimizes the risk to workers.
- Post or relay educational and informational material in an accessible area for workers to review.

Workers (teachers, education assistants, support staff and outside contractors)

- Know the controls required to minimize their risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Participate in COVID-19 related training and instruction.
- Follow established work procedures and instructions as directed by the employer or supervisor.
- Report any unsafe conditions or acts to the supervisor.
- Know how and when to report exposure incidents.

Service operations managers (operations forepersons)

- Maintaining an inventory of PPE for custodians, cleaning and disinfectant products, and well-maintained equipment used for cleaning and disinfecting.
- Providing adequate instruction to custodians on the hazards associated with cleaning work areas and on the safe work procedures specified in this exposure control plan.
- Directing the work in a manner that ensures the risk to custodians is minimized and adequately controlled.
- Revising the work schedule to ensure priority intensive cleaning of impacted work area surfaces and touch points.

Related links

See the following links for additional information, guidance, or resources that may assist you in the development of your plan.

- COVID-19: Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings
- Childcare and Schools (BC CDC)
- Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings (BC CDC)

For more information

The information on this page is based on current recommendations and may change. For the latest guidance, please see the health information from the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control and the latest news from the government of British Columbia.

If you have a question or concern

Workers and employers with questions or concerns about workplace exposure to COVID-19 can call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line at 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland (toll-free within B.C. at 1.888.621.SAFE). You'll be able to speak to a prevention officer to get answers to your questions, and if required, a prevention officer will be assigned to assess the health and safety risk at your workplace.

Translated resources

Our key COVID-19 related resources are also available in Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), French, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese.