



# COVID-19 Protocols for School & District Administrators and Staff: Management of School-Associated Activity



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## Introduction

The emergence of the more transmissible Omicron variant of COVID-19 necessitates changes in public health management and administrator responsibilities for cases of COVID-19 impacting schools. This resource provides K-12 school and district staff and administrators with information on roles and responsibilities in managing school-associated COVID-19 activity.

This document was developed by the Ministry of Education and the BC Centre for Disease Control, in collaboration with Indigenous rightsholders and education partners.

Definitions for terms used in this document are available as [Appendix A](#). Details on public health management of COVID-19, including [advice for individuals](#), and up-to-date data is available from the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#).

## What is Different – Omicron Variant

At this time, the Omicron variant is the most commonly circulating variant of COVID-19 in B.C. This variant is more infectious and is resulting in higher numbers of infections, and there is risk of exposure in all settings. Emerging data from around the world indicates that the Omicron variant is causing less serious illness, especially in highly immunized populations like in B.C.

## What is Different – Management of School-Associated COVID-19 Activity

With higher levels of community transmission, a shorter virus incubation period, and the increased use of rapid antigen testing, contact tracing and close contact notification by public health is not effective to minimize spread of COVID-19. As such, public health management practices (including guidance for K-12 school-associated COVID-19 activity) have transitioned to established practices for other circulating viral illnesses with similar transmission characteristics. This includes individual self-management (i.e., individuals care for themselves, engaging with health care providers when needed), with public health focused on identifying and responding to larger clusters and outbreaks.

In K-12 schools, schools will closely monitor school attendance data to determine if they have met a public-health determined potential activity signal<sup>1</sup>. When met, the school will notify public health and the school community. Public health, led by Medical Health Officers, will continue to lead investigations to determine if additional measures are needed. Public health will also monitor provincial and regional data and will connect with schools if they identify further investigation is needed. This process is outlined below.

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<sup>1</sup> A potential activity signal is a threshold that indicates further investigation is warranted by public health to determine if additional actions are required.

Public health advises that COVID-19 is going to continue to circulate in our population, and there will continue to be exposure to the virus in the community, irrespective of school attendance. More information is available from [BCCDC](#).

## School Management

### Roles and Responsibilities: School-Associated COVID-19 Activity

#### Staff and Student (or their Parent/Caregiver) Responsibilities

- Completing a daily health check, regularly monitor for symptoms of illness and stay home when sick.
- Completing any reporting tool provided by public health if they test positive for COVID-19 (regardless of test type), including providing all school-related information requested.
- Specifying that the absence is illness-related when notifying their school of an absence.
  - As supported by public health, students and staff do not need to disclose if their absence is specific to COVID-19, however those who test positive for COVID-19 should be diligent in ensuring their school is aware their absence is illness-related.
- Continuing to follow public health guidance and recommendations.

#### School and School District/Independent School Authority Responsibilities

- Continuing to track and report daily attendance rates (staff and students away), identifying illness-related absenteeism to the Ministry of Education through MyED.
  - Independent schools who do not use MyED are encouraged to track daily attendance, including illness-related absenteeism.
- Comparing current attendance rates to the previous year(s) to determine if any **potential activity signals** related to attendance have been met.
  - Current public health-identified potential activity signals<sup>2</sup> are:
    - If school attendance is 10% below historical normal (e.g., the previous years),
    - If fewer than 75% of students in a grade are in attendance, OR
      - For smaller schools (e.g., student population under 100) where large fluctuations in school absenteeism rates can be due to small numbers of students away, schools should contact public health if they determine an abnormal number of students are away due to illness over 2-3 days,
    - A functional closure is being considered or implemented.
- When a potential activity signal is met:
  - Notify the school district.
    - School districts should notify the Ministry of Education ([educ.covid@gov.bc.ca](mailto:educ.covid@gov.bc.ca)) daily about schools who have met a potential activity signal.
    - Independent schools should notify the Independent Schools Rapid Response Team.
  - Notify the grade or school community (depending on which potential activity signal is met).

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<sup>2</sup> Regional health authorities may identify specific potential activity signals for an individual school, a grouping of schools, a school district or for all schools within their region.

- An example notification is included as [Appendix B](#).
- Work with Medical Health Officers and other representative of public health to support the distribution of public health information (e.g., notification of increased COVID-19 activity to grades or to the school community) and/or to take additional actions (e.g., testing guidance and support, implement additional measures, etc.) when directed by public health.

### **Regional Health Authority Responsibilities**

- Monitoring provincial COVID-19 reporting tool data for region-specific school-associated potential increased activity.
- Providing advice and guidance to school and school district administrators when they are notified by a school, or they identify based on regional or provincial data, a potential activity signal.
- Working with school and school district administrators and others at school when they determine additional actions are recommended (e.g., disseminate notification to identified grade or school related to identified increased activity, provide testing guidance and support, implement additional measures, distributing public health information, etc.).

### **BCCDC and Ministry of Health Responsibilities**

- Monitoring provincial COVID-19 reporting tool data for school-associated activity.
- Monitoring provincial data, evidence and trends, and providing situational updates on COVID-19 in B.C. K-12 schools.
- Ensuring the Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools recommends prevention measures to be implemented provincially to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading in K-12 schools.

### **Rapid Response Teams**

- Rapid response teams continue to support schools impacted by COVID-19. Their specific role will be determined regionally.

A flow chart outlining administrator roles is included as [Appendix C](#).

### **Functional Closures**

A functional closure of a school is the temporary closure of a school determined by a school district or independent school due to a lack of staff to provide the required level of teaching, supervision, support, and/or custodial to ensure the health and safety of students. This would likely be due to a high number of staff or certain employees away who are required for a school to function, and the inability to temporarily replace them.

School districts (or independent schools) should notify their Medical Health Officer and the Ministry of Education ([educ.covid@gov.bc.ca](mailto:educ.covid@gov.bc.ca)) when they are considering or implementing a functional closure.

### **Role of Rapid Antigen Tests**

Public health continues to direct how rapid antigen tests are best utilized as part of the provincial pandemic response, including when and how they are deployed for school-specific use.

To date, rapid antigen tests have been utilized in K-12 schools when determined necessary by the responsible Medical Health Officer as part of the public health response to clusters and outbreaks. As

more supply becomes available, rapid antigen tests will increasingly be available for use in K-12 schools to support continuity of learning and keeping schools open, under the continued direction of Medical Health Officers.

### Communicable Disease Plans

All schools continue to be required to adhere to the standards, guidelines and protocols from the BC Centre for Disease Control and [WorkSafe BC](#), including ensuring they have a communicable disease plan in place that adheres to the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#).

### Communications and Protecting Personal Privacy

Medical Health Officers play the lead role in determining if, when and how to communicate information regarding increased COVID-19 activity within a school. School and school district administrators should work with their Medical Health Officer when a potential activity signal is met to determine if specific communications are warranted (e.g., notification to the broader school community).

Public health has encouraged schools to routinely communicate to the school community the need to follow public health measures, always self-monitor for symptoms (including completing a daily health check before coming to school), and to stay home when sick. An example is included below in [Appendix D](#).

Recent public health guidance recommends those who [test positive for COVID-19](#) notify those whom they live with, or who they've had intimate contact with. While those who test positive do not need to notify the school or others at school, individuals may still contact a school for this purpose. To protect personal privacy, schools cannot release individual contact information for the purpose of an individual (staff, student or parent/caregiver) seeking to notifying others of their test result. Schools should also not notify others on an individual's behalf.

If an individual contacts a school requesting they facilitate notifying others at school, school administrators (or staff, if directly contacted) can share the following:

- *Anyone who has tested positive using a rapid test<sup>3</sup> should complete the online reporting tool provided by public health, and provide all school-related information requested.*
- *Public health does not require students or staff to notify our school if they have tested positive for COVID-19, or to notify other individuals at school.*
- *To protect personal privacy, we are unable to provide personal contact information for the purpose of notifying others of a test result.*
- *We continue to follow public health guidance, including monitoring school absenteeism to help determine if there may be increased school-associated COVID-19 activity.*

Media requests regarding COVID-19 activity within a school should be directed to the regional health authority for a response.

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<sup>3</sup> Health authorities directly track school-associated cases from PCR tests, so completing the provincial reporting tool is not necessary for individuals who received this type of test.

## Records Management

Schools continue to be encouraged to maintain up-to-date records of the administrative groupings (e.g., classes, sections, etc.) that individuals are a part of.

## Protocol if a Student/Staff Develops Symptoms of Illness at School

If a student or staff member develops symptoms at school, schools should:

- Provide the student/staff with a mask if they don't have one (exceptions should be made for students and staff who cannot wear masks for health or behavioural reasons, or if the person is experiencing gastrointestinal symptoms and are at risk of vomiting).
- Provide the student/staff with a space where they can wait comfortably that is separated from others.
  - o Younger children must be supervised when separated. Supervising staff should wear a non-medical mask and face shield if they are unable to maintain physical distance, avoid touching bodily fluids as much as possible, and practice diligent hand hygiene.
- Make arrangements for the student/staff to go home as soon as possible (e.g., contact student's parent/caregiver for pick-up).
- Clean and disinfect the areas the student/staff used.
  - o Staff responsible for facility cleaning should clean and disinfect the surfaces/equipment which the person's bodily fluids may have been in contact with while they were ill (e.g., their desk in a classroom, the bathroom stall they used, etc.) prior to the surfaces/equipment being used by others.
  - o Cleaning/disinfecting the entire room the person was in a (a "terminal" clean) is not required in these circumstances.
- Requested that the student seek guidance regarding [testing for COVID-19](#), and stay home until symptoms have improved and they feel well enough to participate in all school-related activities (see *Return to School* section for more information).

## Return to School

When a student, staff or other adult can return to school depends on the type of symptoms they experienced, if a COVID-19 test is recommended and the result of their test. See [Appendix A: COVID-19 Symptoms, Testing & Return to School](#) in the Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 for specific guidance.

## Key Contacts

Regional Health Authorities will provide schools and/or districts with their contact information. Other COVID-19 related inquiries can be directed to the Ministry of Education at [educ.covid@gov.bc.ca](mailto:educ.covid@gov.bc.ca).

## Appendix A: Definitions

### **Potential Activity Signal**

A potential activity signal is a threshold that indicates further investigation is warranted by public health to determine if additional actions are required (e.g., disseminate notification to identified grade or school related to identified increased activity, provide testing guidance and support, implement additional measures, distributing public health information, etc.).

### **Functional School Closure**

A functional closure of a school is a temporary closure determined by a school district or independent school due to a lack of staff to provide the required level of teaching, supervision, support, and/or custodial to ensure the health and safety of students. This would likely be due to a high number of staff or certain employees away who are required for a school to function, and the inability to temporarily replace them.

### **Transportation Closure**

A transportation closure is a lack of staff able to provide the required level of transportation services for students. This would likely be due to bus drivers and/or mechanics being away and the inability to replace those absences.

### **Public Health Closure**

A public health closure is the temporary closing of a school by order of a Medical Health Officer when they determine it is necessary to prevent the excessive transmission of a communicable disease (e.g., COVID-19).

## Appendix B: Example Notification When Potential Activity Signal Has Been Met

Dear school community,

Based on review of attendance patterns, we've determined we have met a COVID-19 potential activity signal. A potential activity signal is a threshold based on school attendance. When met, it means public health will investigate further to determine if additional actions are needed. Because people are absent for many reasons, we do not know if there is increased COVID-19 activity at our school.

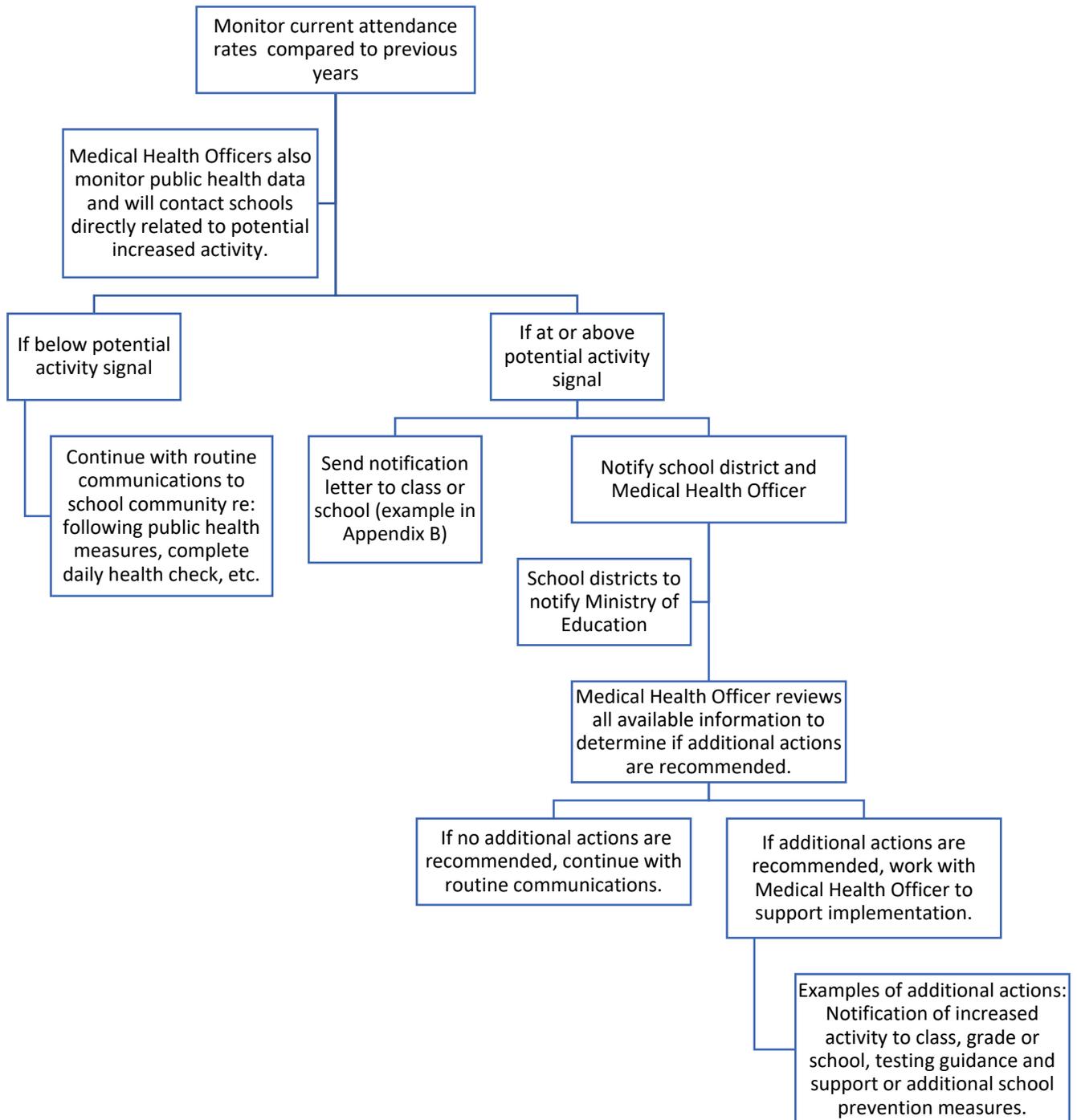
We are following up with public health and will share back with our community if they recommend any additional actions should be taken.

We strongly encourage everyone to complete a [daily health check](#) and continue to attend school if they are not sick.

Public health continues to recommend everyone stay home when they are sick, and to seek testing when recommended. More information is available from [BCCDC](#).

## Appendix C: Administrator Actions - School-Associated COVID-19 Activity

The following outlines the process for schools and public health to monitor for and respond to potential increased COVID-19 activity in a school.



## Appendix D: Sample routine messaging to school community re: continuing to follow public health guidance

Dear school community,

As COVID-19 continues to circulate in our community, we encourage everyone to follow public health guidance to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 in our school. This includes:

- Completing a daily health check before you come to school. You can use the [BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#).
- Monitoring yourself regularly for symptoms of illness. If you are sick, stay home. [Seek testing when recommended](#).
- Following [provincial restrictions in place](#).

[BCCDC](#) continues to provide trusted information about COVID-19, including how to protect yourself, your family and your community and what to do if you suspect you have the virus.

While we all continue to navigate disrupted routines and changes as the pandemic continues, it's important we look after our mental health and well-being. Don't wait to reach out. School-specific resources are available from [erase](#). Information for individuals is available from [BCCDC](#).