

COVID-19 & REOPENING SCHOOLS

Frequently Asked Questions

Guidance given by Public Health reflects a general scenario and is based on current data and local numbers. This information is subject to change as new information or evidence about COVID-19 emerges locally and provincially. This document will be updated if any of the contained information needs to be revised, and an updated document will be shared with local school board partners.

Screening

* Screening tools will be attached once available, as well as reference to the outbreak and case management document.

1. What is the process for screening and why is it important?

All staff teachers and students must complete the daily screening questionnaires provided to them before leaving for school every morning. Ensuring individuals with potential symptoms of COVID-19 are not attending school is one of the most important measures to reduce the risk of COVID cases and spread. If anyone fails their self-screening they are to follow the protocols in place.

Hand Hygiene

2. How often and when should hands be washed?

The need to hand wash is based on actions, not a number. Moments where hands need to be washed include: at the beginning of the day; before and after eating; before and after gym; after using the washroom; after coughing and sneezing into hands or using a tissue; and after outdoor time. Staff and students will likely be washing their hands at least hourly if not more, based on their activities during the day.

A recommendation from SickKids is to have regularly scheduled hand washing breaks in addition to the regular moments above. As this may increase traffic in the washrooms, handwashing should be done in the classroom, if possible, at available sinks or using alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR).

3. What temperature should the water be?

Warm water or room temperature water is ideal, the water just needs to be comfortable for handwashing. Soaps and the friction of rubbing them together are important steps, as well as proper drying with a paper towel or hand dryer. For more information and a video on how to properly wash your hands, visit [phu.fyi/covid-health](https://www.phu.fyi/covid-health)

4. Should hand hygiene be done immediately upon entering the school, before leaving home or can it be done in the washroom at school?

Increased frequency and efficient hand hygiene is highly recommended. Hand sanitizer should be available in school entrances, exits and in classrooms. To minimize traffic in the washroom, consider hand hygiene options in as many areas as possible, such as entrance and exit points to school, classroom sinks, cafeteria, gym, other resource rooms, staff rooms, and classrooms. This can be achieved with alcohol-based hand rub with a minimum of 60% alcohol (ABHR). Hand washing is recommended upon entering the school, and frequently throughout the day for staff, teachers, students and visitors.



5. Is non-alcohol-based hand sanitizer acceptable to use in schools?

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), non-alcohol-based hand sanitizers are not recommended as they do not work equally well on all types of germs and they do not kill germs, but reduce their levels on the skin. Hand sanitizer is recommended to contain no less than 60% alcohol. Consult the Health Canada website for an up-to-date list of approved hand sanitizers.

Physical Distancing/Cohorts

6. Does physical distancing need to be maintained within each cohort?

Physical distancing should be promoted and facilitated as much as possible in each cohort at all times. Different cohorts need to physically distance from each other. If staff are teaching more than one cohort, they need to maintain a physical distance from the cohorts. While 2 m is the recommendation for physical

10. What is the recommendation for secondary students who usually leave school during their free time or lunch?

Students could still be permitted to leave. It would be important to emphasize physical distancing and encourage wearing a face covering when interacting with peers outside their family, social circle or cohort. Also, students should be reminded about mandatory face coverings when entering public buildings such as restaurants, convenience stores and grocery stores. In addition, whether on- or off-site for lunch or free time, all students should wash their hands on re-entry to school.

11. What are the protocols/recommendations around the movement of students within the school when needed (e.g., to recess, to access the gym)?

Movement within the school needs to be done in a way that permits physical distancing between cohorts. Staggering recess times, and times when classes are accessing outdoors or other parts of the school. Have class changes in larger areas, instead of in the hall. Time should be scheduled to allow for disinfection of gym equipment between cohorts, this would cut down on cross traffic entering and exiting the gym. For example, if a class is waiting to go outside, have the class go outside while the first class is still there, the two classes need to be under control and able to physical distance from each other in the larger space to allow for the first class to leave.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

12. What masks and when are masks recommended in the school setting?

All school staff are required to wear masks. Exceptions to the requirement to wear masks will be put in place by schools and school boards (www.ontario.ca/page/guide-reopening-ontario-schools).

Medical masks and eye protection (face shield or goggles) must be worn by staff that are supervising a student who is symptomatic pending pick-up. The staff or student who is symptomatic also needs to be wearing a level 1 mask. In situations where direct contact is required with a student, regardless of symptoms, for positioning and assistance with eating or toileting: medical masks, eye protection and gloves should be provided.

Medical masks (Level 1) should also be worn when cleaning up a spill of blood or body fluid and there is a risk of splashes, in addition to other PPE as appropriate, such as eye protection, gown and gloves.

Students in Grades 4 to 12 will be required to wear a non-medical or homemade (cloth) mask indoors in school. This includes in hallways and during classes. Students from kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged to wear masks but at this time, it is not required for indoor spaces.

Masks should be changed when they are damp, dirty or damaged. It is not recommended to reuse medical masks; disposed of then when crumpled, moist or visually contaminated. It is also important to note that mask use does not negate the need to ensure distancing, screening, hand hygiene and other measures.

More information on how to wear and care for your masks is available on the [PHU COVID-19 Masks](#) web page.

19. Are there any requirements for disinfecting products?

Classroom Items

23. Does each student need their own box of facial tissues? Can they have a general box per class?

It is not necessary for each student to have their own box; one box per class is acceptable. Hand hygiene needs to be performed after using a tissue.

24. Are lockers able to be used?

Access to lockers should be scheduled so different cohorts would not be able to access lockers at the same time, to limit time spent at lockers, and restrict sharing with others. It would be ideal to have them grouped by cohort and have each cohort's locker group spread out by at least 2 m (6 ft.).

25. What items are students able to bring to school and take home from school?

Items from home (e.g., toys) should be discouraged, except for lunch bags, backpacks, sun protection, water bottles and clothing. Other items like homework and school work and textbooks can move between home and school. These items should all be assigned to one student and not shared.

26. Can books be shared by students?

Items like books that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected should be **batched**. Batched items can be rotated on a weekly basis and quarantined for a week before use again.

Symptoms & Isolation*

* As all sections and recommendations are subject to adaptations based on best evidence and changes in guidance, this section will be edited as needed to reflect the case/cluster/outbreak management protocol, once released. Public health will lead any case investigation with school boards and schools, coordinate with health care system partners as needed, and will communicate any changes in guidance with school boards.

27. When should a student or staff be isolated and sent home? What about those with seasonal allergies or chronic conditions with symptoms on the self-assessment?

Children often exhibit mild or atypical symptoms of COVID-19 or they may be asymptomatic. It is important if a staff or student has any symptoms listed on the screening tool, they immediately put on a medical grade mask, isolate, go home and arrange to be tested for COVID-19. Best judgement should be used for those with seasonal allergies or symptoms that may be caused by another pre-determined reason.

28. What is the recommendation for isolation rooms/areas for students waiting to be picked up?

A medical mask (Level 1) and eye protection (goggles or face shield) needs to be worn by staff supervising students who are symptomatic pending pick-up. Staff or students who are symptomatic also need to be wearing a medical mask, assuming they are able to do so safely. This area should be a separate room with distancing of 2 m from others, and separate from other students, although in some schools this is difficult. Choose a space that is near the entrance or exit, can be disinfected easily, and is away from heavier traffic. PPE kits with a gown, gloves, eye protection and mask should be available in the isolation room should staff

require them. In addition, the workspace (for staff), and desk (for students) of anyone symptomatic should be cleaned and disinfected immediately, in addition to the isolation room, upon departure of the individual with symptoms.

29. What process should schools follow to assist in contact tracing?

Record keeping, and contact information, for both staff and students will be extremely important in the investigation, follow-up and contact tracing of any cases in schools. Records of students and educators that are in each cohort should be kept for contact tracing purposes.

30. Will the Health Unit provide documentation if a child or staff member tests positive for COVID, but feels ready to return to school/work?

If a person in the school community (staff or student) tests positive for COVID-19, they will be isolated from school for a minimum of 14 days, beginning from their symptom start date or test date depending on whether they are symptomatic or asymptomatic. The Health Unit will follow protocols in the Ministry outbreak guidance documents and advise cases and contacts when they are able to discontinue any isolation protocols.

School Buses

31. What are the recommendations for physical distancing on school buses? Should students be seated in every second bench to maintain a 2 metre distance, posing challenges by drastically reducing bus capacity? Or should students be seated one student per bench?

To the greatest extent possible, support for physical distancing of 2 m between riders should be implemented, including planning for one student per seat (unless students are in the same household); and having students from the same classroom cohort sit in the same area, where possible. Children from the same household can be permitted to sit together and are not required to physically distance. Assigned seating and maintaining records for buses are other important items that support any potential case investigation and contact tracing.

Another item to consider is having a supply of medical masks available if a child becomes ill during the bus

