



Back To School Facts: What you need to know for the return to school 2020-21

B.C.'s Back to School Plan

Students in B.C. will return to in-class learning by September 10, 2020. B.C.'s Back to School Plan includes

- 1** new health and safety measures
- 2** increased funding for protective equipment like masks
- 3** new learning groups

These measures are in place to help keep everyone safe in school. School districts will communicate with parents what the plan will look like for your family.

The decision to return to full-time, in-person classes

Plans for a safe return to school have been made based on the recommendation from Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, and other public health experts. Strict public health and safety guidelines have been created to make sure all schools are safe. All boards of education and independent school authorities are required to implement [the Public Health Guidance for K-12 Settings](#). Plans continue to be shaped with the input of educators, parents, support workers, school leaders, trustees, Indigenous communities and public health experts.

School supports children in developing their potential and acquiring the knowledge, skills and abilities they need for lifelong success. Getting children back into the classroom is essential for their overall health and well-being, emotional development, social growth, and educational needs.

COVID-19 science & kids

COVID-19 has a very low infection rate in children 19 years and under, and especially low in children under 10. Serological tests have confirmed that in B.C., less than 1% of all children tested have been COVID-19 positive. Children who have developed COVID-19 have most likely acquired it from adults in the household setting. Most kids who do get COVID-19 usually have milder symptoms, such as a low-grade fever, dry cough, and gastrointestinal issues.

Health and safety measures

[Health and safety measures](#) help create safe schools and reduce the spread of COVID-19. Safety measures include students and staff staying home when they are sick (no exceptions!), increased cleaning at schools, regular handwashing and/or hand sanitizing, wearing masks in common spaces, keeping a safe distance from others when possible, and keeping students in classrooms and learning groups. Safety measures have been proven to work well in schools because they are controlled environments that have consistent groups of people.



Stay home when sick

Public health guidelines for schools are firm (see pg.11): if a student, staff member or any other adult has any symptoms of a cold, influenza, COVID-19, or any other infectious respiratory disease, they must not enter the school.



Daily health screening

Parents and caregivers must do a daily health check to find out how their child feels before going to school. Ask these questions:

- Does your child have the symptoms of a common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease?
- Has your child been outside Canada in the last 14 days?
- Has your child been identified as a close contact of a confirmed case or outbreak?

If the answer is **yes** to any of these questions, you must keep your child at home, keep them isolated, and seek care from a health-care provider. Staff should ask themselves the same questions each day.

Learning Groups or Cohorts

Learning groups were recommended by the Provincial Health Officer to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19. A learning group is a group of students and staff who remain together throughout the school quarter, semester or year and who primarily interact with each other. Students will remain in their learning group during recess, lunch and break times. It's important to remember that students will spend most of their time in the classroom, with much smaller numbers of people than the learning group maximum.



For example, a learning group could be made up of:

- A single class of students (20-30)
- Multiple classes that sometimes join together for activities like physical education (PE) or music
- A group of secondary school students with the same courses in the same quarter or semester

For students, learning groups will mean:

- Fewer contacts overall
- Fewer shared spaces and surfaces
- Keeping a safe distance and limiting physical contact
- Regular activities (lunch or recess) with the same group of people
- If someone gets COVID-19 at school, public health officials can quickly identify close contacts and get in touch
- Practicing other safety measures, like regular handwashing

Learning groups provide important benefits for students, including more in-class learning time, increased peer interaction and support, and decreased feelings of isolation.

Learning group sizes

Learning groups sizes will vary depending on school districts and individual schools. Their maximum size is smallest in elementary and middle schools because it is more challenging for younger students to maintain physical distance.



Students in secondary school are better able to keep a safe distance, minimize physical contact, clean their hands, and recognize if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Learning groups can also include staff like teachers, specialist support staff, and Education Assistants (EAs).

- **Elementary:** 60
- **Middle:** 60
- **Secondary:** 120

What happens if there's a COVID-19 case at school?

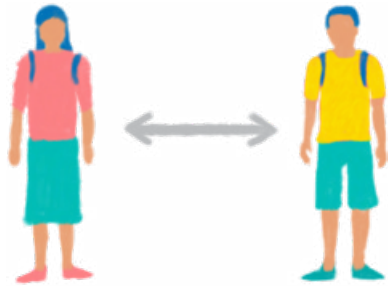
If a student or staff shows any symptoms of COVID-19 while at school, they will be put in a separate room and returned home as soon as possible. Staff will clean and disinfect the areas the student was in. Parents will have child assessed by a health-care provider. If COVID-19 is confirmed, public health will notify the school and district. They will then contact trace, identify any potential COVID-19 exposures

and reach out to any confirmed close contacts. Parents/guardians will be notified if their child has been in contact with a COVID-positive person. If that happens, your child is required to isolate for 10 days. Public health officials will work closely with the school to determine if further actions should be taken. The school will support student learning while they are in self-isolation.

Keeping a safe distance

Students and staff are encouraged to maintain a safe distance from others in school. In classrooms, students will be given as much space as possible depending on the class size.

Students and teachers in learning groups will not be expected to stay two metres apart, but physical contact will be limited. Schools can help reduce contacts in different ways, like staggering breaks and transition times; incorporating individual activities; reminding students to keep their hands and personal belongings (food, art supplies, etc.) to themselves.



Wearing masks at school

Masks will be required for all middle and secondary students, teachers, and staff in the following circumstances:

- 1 on buses
- 2 in common areas like hallways
- 3 outside the classroom or learning groups when you can't maintain a safe distance.



People who cannot wear masks for medical reasons will not be required to wear one. Students and staff will each be provided with two reusable masks. Everyone will be required to keep a safe distance and wash hands regularly. Everyone must treat people wearing masks, and those who cannot for medical reasons, with respect.

Students with additional needs

Parents of students who are immune-compromised or have underlying medical conditions are encouraged to consult with their health-care provider to determine their level of risk regarding return to school. If a medical professional determines that a student cannot attend school due to their health risks, the school district will work with the family to review alternative learning options for the student.

Students with disabilities, diverse abilities or those who require additional supports will have access to and receive the same supports and services they had prior to the pandemic.

School buses

Public health measures will help keep school buses clean and safe. Students should clean their hands before and after riding the school bus. Buses will be loaded from the back to the front and offloaded from the front to back. Students in middle school and high school will be required to wear a mask on the school bus. Buses will be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

Options for learning

Parents of K-12 students have options for their kids' education for September 2020:

- 1 In-class instruction: Students attend their regular school in learning groups
- 2 Online & distributed learning: Students can be connected to a teacher for a class, term, or year through a public or independent school.
- 3 Homeschooling: Students can be educated outside the B.C. education system.
- 4 Alternative learning: The Ministry of Education has also given school districts the flexibility to find options that work for families. This includes remote options for students within their districts, as well as the tools school districts need to increase their existing programs to meet demand.

Parents will be contacted by their school districts to determine their needs and begin working with them on solutions.



Stay Informed Via These Resources:
www.gov.bc.ca/COVID-19 | www.bccdc.ca | 1-888-COVID19
Symptom Self-Assessment: covid19.thrive.health

