

August 7, 2020

Welcoming Our Students Back: Restoring Safe Schools

Questions and Answers

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.

Will students attend school five days per week?

- Students in Kindergarten through Grade 8, as well as those with special needs, will be in class full days, five days per week while we are in *Level 1: In-class learning response level* (see *Welcoming Our Students Back: Restoring Safe Schools* at www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/k-12-reopeningplan-stage-2.pdf).
- Grades 9 to 12 students will return for up to five days per week of classroom instruction if high schools can reduce the risk of transmission by effectively timetabling, implementing physical distancing measures and the use of cohorts, and supporting any contact tracing that may be required. The priority remains that students are to be ensured as much in-class learning as possible.

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?

- Virtual learning is not an option. Ensuring the safety, health, and well-being of all students, staff, and families has been a guiding principle in our planning, and public health has determined that it is safe to resume in-class learning while following public health guidance. This includes screening, enhanced hand hygiene, physical distancing, the use of cohorts, and outbreak management, which are paramount in keeping as many students as possible in schools this fall and throughout the pandemic.
- Division-level remote learning will be in place for students **who are medically advised** not to return to in-class learning due to COVID-related risk factors.
- School staff and administrators will continue to support students in their return to in-class learning. Mental health and well-being are critical factors in returning to in-class learning plans. As such, regular check-ins and informal assessments will play an important role in supporting transitions.

How will students get to school?

- School buses will be running in September for those students who are eligible for school bus transportation.
- For the short term, parents are encouraged to transport their own children to school, if at all possible.
- 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.

Will students, teachers, and staff be required to wear a mask at school or on the bus?

- Students in Grade 5 and above, as well as teachers and staff, are strongly recommended to wear a non-medical mask in common areas throughout schools and when physical distancing of two metres is not possible. Younger students can wear masks too. Masks will be required when on school buses for all students in Grades 5 and above.

Will there be screening for students before they enter the school?

- Students and staff will need to self-screen at home before going to school. Parents and caregivers are responsible for their own child's self-screening. School staff may conduct screening at school.

Are visitors and volunteers allowed in schools?

- Schools will minimize visitors and volunteers at school facilities. When their presence is necessary, visitors and volunteers must first self-screen 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.

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 recommends two metres of physical distancing. When this is not possible, students will remain within cohorts to reduce exposure to others. Cohorts will distance themselves from other groups to limit exposure. In these instances, there must be at least one metre between students as they sit at their desks.

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 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 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 must 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 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* (June 2020) (see www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/coronavirus/famcirculars/Covid-19_Practice_Guide_ELCC_April92020.pdf) indicates that the use of non-medical masks (cloth or homemade masks) within child care settings is not recommended. However, some staff and children may choose to bring and wear a non-medical mask while in the centre. Masks are not recommended for children under two years of age.
- Also, as of June 1, 2020, licensed child care centres, including facilities in schools, can continue to provide care for up to 24 children. Larger centres with separate rooms and external entrances can accommodate up to 24 children per room. 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 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 special breaks for hand washing and desk cleaning?

- Staff and students will wash their hands frequently with soap and water for at least 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 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.

Will there be recess?

- Yes. Lunch and recess breaks will be staggered.

Can students use playground equipment?

- Yes. Outdoor activities are encouraged and outdoor spaces and playground structures can be used.
- Public health indicates that playgrounds and play structures are low risk for transmission.
- 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 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 students continue to play in group sports, such as on volleyball teams?

- Sports teams may continue as long as the school ensures they follow up-to-date information regarding Manitoba's *Restoring Safe Services Sports Guidelines* (see www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/sports-guidelines.html).

Will there be music and choir?

- Schools will need to assess their ability to offer choir.
- Schools must ensure that they follow Manitoba's *Restoring Safe Services Sports Guidelines* (see www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/sports-guidelines.html) and *Guidelines for Vocalists and Instrumentalists* (see www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/music-guidelines.html).

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 provincial tests?

- A decision about Grade 12 provincial tests will be made and communicated by the end of September. This will depend on the public health situation and the extent to which students are able to access classroom learning.

Will schools shut down if there is a positive case identified in a school?

- Decisions about school closures will be made on a case-by-case basis with public health leading the response and providing guidance, including ensuring appropriate supports are in place to coordinate the response.
- Public health will advise staff and students if they have been in close contact, if they need to self-isolate or self-monitor, and when they can return to school.

What happens if a student in a class tests positive? Will parents be notified?

- In the event of a confirmed case of COVID-19 connected with a class, public health will lead the response and provide guidance, including ensuring appropriate supports are in place to coordinate the response. Public health will advise staff and students if they have been in close contact, if they need to self-isolate or self-monitor, and when they can return to school.

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

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