

# COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for NCDSB schools 2021-2022

*Learning together.  
Striving for excellence.  
In service to God and each other.*

Version 2: August 17, 2021

The entire NCDSB community continues to work together to keep our schools open, safe, and welcoming to students and staff during the global pandemic.

The pandemic has changed almost every aspect of our daily lives. We are having to find new, innovative ways to learn together, to strive for excellence, and to remain in service to God and each other. Despite the challenges we experience, we remain hopeful and optimistic. We are committed to continuing our journey in Catholic Education, as we live out our vision of being faithful and thoughtful learners, working together to transform the world.

### **Our strategic directions**

We will dedicate our efforts and time...

toward responsible stewardship of our God-given gifts and resources.

toward innovative and excellent programs, services, and opportunities that are responsive to our students and families.

toward nurturing a culture of learning by investing in ourselves and one another.

### **The guiding principles of this plan:**

- to provide a safe and healthy school environment for students, staff, and safeguarding the broader communities in which they live;
- to provide a consistently high-quality Catholic education for every student of the NCDSB;
- to address potential gaps in student learning, mental health and well-being;
- to ensure equity of access for students, staff, and families;
- to be adaptable, flexible, and open to working together to improve outcomes for all.

These guidelines are intended to provide our families, staff, and stakeholders with confidence as we continue to make our very best efforts to keep NCDSB schools open and to protect the health, wellness, and safety of all.

We will review these guidelines regularly and will make the necessary adaptations and changes to best respond to the current realities of the global pandemic and the needs of our students and staff.

The pandemic has brought with it complex challenges that continue to require creative solutions. We will engage with our stakeholders regularly to ensure the best possible outcomes for the NCDSB community.

***We remain committed to providing high quality Catholic Education  
in safe, healthy, and inclusive learning environments.***



# Northeastern Catholic District School Board

## COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools

### GENERAL PROVISIONS

Elementary schools will be reopened with conventional in-person delivery of learning with enhanced health and safety protocols.

Secondary students will engage in a modified semester schedule, allowing for participation in four classes on a two-day schedule.

Students may use common spaces (cafeterias, media resource rooms). Members of different cohorts can interact outside with distancing encouraged or inside with distancing and masking.

Specialized education staff and teachers, such as French teachers, and education support staff are permitted to go into classrooms, and multiple schools to provide the full breadth of programming for students.

In preparation for a potential closure, the NCDSB has a plan in place to move to remote learning to ensure continuity of learning for students. This plan will be communicated with all stakeholders at the start of the school year, and will be reviewed regularly to ensure preparedness for a pivot.

Students who are participating in a virtual program are coming together from classrooms across the district. The virtual program is consistent with the requirements of [Policy/Program Memorandum No. 164](#). Families who elect to participate in a virtual learning program must remain in that mode of learning for the entire school year.

### PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

*The NCDSB is expected to employ multiple protective strategies and a layering of controls to support healthier and safer environments for students and staff. There is not one specific measure that will prevent transmission from occurring in schools, but rather there are multiple structural and individual elements that contribute to making schools healthier spaces and reduce the risk of infection to in-person attendees.*

#### SCREENING

All students and staff must self-screen every day before attending school using the mandate screening tool.

[COVID-19 SCHOOL AND CHILD CARE SCREENING TOOL](#)

Staff will be required to attest that the screen has been completed in accordance with locally-developed strategies.

All students and staff who are experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19 as identified in the screening tool, must not attend school and must follow the guidance provided in the screening tool, which may include seeking appropriate medical attention as required, and/or getting tested for COVID-19.

The ministry may direct school boards and schools to perform daily on-site confirmation of self-screening, such as during a period of potential higher transmission (for example, after a holiday period). The NCDSB will communicate such procedures with school staff in a timely manner.

Any staff, student or visitor that does not pass the screening procedures will not attend school.

## **STUDENT MASKS**

Students in Grades 1-12 are required to wear properly fitted non-medical or cloth masks indoors in school, including hallways and during classes, as well as on school vehicles. In instances of combined K-1 classrooms, all students in the class will be required to wear a mask.

Masks may be temporarily removed indoors to consume food or drink, with a minimum distance of two metres maintained between cohorts and as much distancing as possible within a cohort.

Students are not required to wear a mask outdoors, but distancing should be encouraged as much as possible.

Students in kindergarten are strongly encouraged but not required to wear a mask.

Parents/Guardians are responsible to provide and clean their child's cloth mask.

Exemptions may be permitted under very exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Principal and in accordance with the NCDSB Protocol for Mask Exemptions.

## **STAFF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)**

All required personal protective equipment (PPE) will be provided by the school board.

Medical masks (surgical/procedural) are required to be worn by school staff and visitors indoors in school, including hallways and during class.

Staff are not required to wear medical masks outdoors.

Staff must maintain at least two metres distancing when consuming food/drinks.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) including both medical masks and eye protection is required for education staff working in close contact with students who are not wearing masks (for example, students in kindergarten). Eye protection is not required for education staff working with students who wear masks. It is strongly encouraged however, that staff wear eye protection when two metres of physical distancing cannot be maintained (in accordance with occupational health and safety requirements).

Where necessary for faces to be seen for lip reading to support students who are deaf or hard of hearing, masks with clear sections may be appropriate.

Where staff are required to perform an Aerosol Generating Medical Procedure (AGMP) or required to be in the same room when an AGMP is being performed, N95 respirators (fit tested) will be provided. This procedure does not apply to any NCDSB school at this time.

## HAND HYGIENE AND RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

Appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette are among the most important protective strategies.

Regular handwashing hygiene will be embedded into the daily schedule and will be dictated by events including but not limited to: *start of day, after recess, before eating, after eating, hand related activities.*

Hand sanitizers will be available in classrooms, the main office, and other high traffic areas. Hand sanitizer will be available in school entrances and exits.

Students and staff will be encouraged to practice proper respiratory etiquette and to avoid touching their face, eyes, nose and mouth.

Signage will be posted at handwashing stations to remind students and staff of appropriate hand washing practices.

## DISTANCING AND CONGREGATION

As much distancing as possible between students, between students and staff, and between staff members should be promoted and practiced.

Schools are encouraged to remove unnecessary furniture and place desks with as much distancing as possible, and to allow teachers as much teaching space as possible. Desks should face forward rather than in circles or groupings.

Periods of student movement should be staggered, as much as possible, to limit student congregation in the hallways.

Congregation of teachers/staff should be limited to minimize potential for adult-to-adult transmission.

Schools will develop school arrival and departure procedures that support physical distancing, as much as possible. These procedures may include, but are not limited to:

- i) Maximizing the use of all possible entrances and exits to support the beginning and end of the school day;
- ii) Creating designated routes for students to get to/from classrooms;
- iii) Providing visual cues or physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs/posters on walls.

## **RECESS AND BREAKS OUTDOORS**

Students do not need to stay within their cohort during recess and breaks outdoors, but distancing should be encouraged between cohorts, as much as possible.

Shared materials outdoors are permitted, with appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. This includes playground equipment.

## **CLEANING AND DISINFECTION STANDARDS AND PROTOCOLS**

Custodial services will be available at all times that students are present in the school.

High traffic areas and high touch points will be cleaned at a minimum twice daily or as required.

All students and staff will be encouraged to promote constant and good cleaning practices.

Hand sanitizer will be provided in high traffic areas such as the entry points to the school and classrooms or where hand washing is not easily accessible. Hand washing will be reinforced as the key strategy to use to maintain good hand hygiene.

Custodians will adhere to the NCDSB standards and cleaning protocols, under the direction of the Principal and Manager of Plant and Maintenance. Only approved products that have a drug identification number (DIN) will be used according to the manufacturer's instructions.

The NCDSB program for cleaning and disinfecting school, including a regular review of practices to determine where enhancements might be made. This review will include frequency and timing of cleaning and disinfecting, choice of cleaning products, child safety, staffing, signage and PPE for cleaning staff. Revisions to the program will be communicated accordingly to Principals and staff.

## **SHARED MATERIALS**

The use of shared materials is permitted.

There will be a focus on regular hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette to reduce the risk of infection related to shared equipment, particularly when regular cleaning of shared objects is not feasible.

For staff using an NCDSB photocopier, it is expected that users will wipe down a photocopier using an NCDSB approved cleaning solution, provided by the ICT department. It is strongly recommended that staff members wash their hands before/after using a photocopier.

## **SHARED SPACES**

Signage and physical building markings will be mounted in all schools.

Shared homerooms, shared library spaces, labs, and common areas are permitted.

Use of lockers/cubbies is permitted.

When different cohorts interact in shared indoor spaces, masking and as much distancing as possible are required.

## **CAFETERIA USE AND LUNCH PROTOCOLS**

Students may eat together:

- i) Outdoors, with physical distancing encouraged;
- ii) Indoors, with a minimum distance of two metres maintained between cohorts and as much distancing as possible within a cohort.

All students are encouraged to bring their own drink bottle that is labelled, kept with them during the day and not shared. Water filling stations are available in every school.

Each student will have their own individual meal or snack with no common food items.

The use of microwaves may resume, at the discretion of the Principal. Protocols must be in place to ensure proper cleaning strategies and physical distancing requirements are in place.

Students and staff will minimize waste by participating in a litterless lunch strategy – all containers, storage bags, food waste, and wrappers will return home at the end of the day.

The cafeteria at O’Gorman High School will be open to students, but efforts to minimize the number of students accessing the space will be enforced, in accordance with the capacity of the cafeteria.

Students and staff who can reasonably eat lunch at home are encouraged to do so.

## **FOOD PROGRAMS**

Nutrition /third party food programs and non-instructional food events are permitted to operate, provided that the food handlers use adequate food handling and safety practices.

At this time, there will be no common food items or common sharing. Students and staff will have their own individual snacks/meals.

## ASSEMBLIES

School assemblies or other student/gatherings are permitted in accordance with the provincial requirements under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#).

## VISITORS

All visitors are required to self-screen and must attest the results of the screen by signing in at the office.

All visitors must wear a medical grade mask while on school premises. A mask will be provided by the school, if needed.

As much as possible, visitors should make pre-arrangement appointments with the Principal. This includes, but is not limited to parents/guardians, pastoral workers, and third-party service providers to students.

At the advice of the local public health units, the NCDSB may be asked to restrict visitor access. In such cases, the Director of Education will advise the schools accordingly.

## STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

*There continues to be driver shortages and bus delays across the NCDSB. Therefore, it is **very important** that all families subscribe to the [Netribus](#) portal in order to receive important notifications from North East Tri Board Student Transportation. By subscribing, families receive an email advising them of route delays and cancellations in real-time.*

## CAPACITY

School vehicles will operate at full capacity.

The seat directly behind the driver should remain empty to maintain physical distancing between the driver and riders.

Where vehicles are able to operate at less than full capacity, students should be seated in a manner that maximizes physical distancing.

Windows should be opened when feasible to increase ventilation.



Families are strongly encouraged to make their own arrangements for transporting their child to and from school, wherever possible, and/or use active transportations as much as possible (walking or cycling, as examples).

### **MANDATORY MASKING ON SCHOOL BUSES**

All students (Kindergarten to Grade 12) must wear a mask on a school bus.

### **ASSIGNED SEATS**

Students will be assigned seats and records of the seating plan must be readily available for contact tracing purposes.

Students who live in the same household or are in the same classroom cohort should be seated together where possible.

### **CLEANING**

School bus operators will be responsible to ensure that school buses follow an enhanced cleaning protocol of disinfecting high-touch surfaces at least twice daily.

## **VENTILATION**

Building on what has been achieved to date, the NCDSB is expected to continue optimizing air quality in classrooms and learning environments through improving ventilation and/or filtration.

The NCDSB is expected to continue using and/or adopt ventilation improvement measures that are applicable to school's existing ventilation systems.

For schools with full mechanical ventilation, the NCDSB is expected to:

- use the highest-grade filters possible, preferably MERV 13 filters
- undertake frequent filter changes throughout the school year
- operate ventilation systems 2 hours or more before and after school occupancy
- calibrate HVAC systems for maximum air flow and increased fresh air intake

This guidance also applies to schools with mechanical ventilation for parts of schools, such as additions.

For schools or parts of schools without mechanical ventilation, the NCDSB is expected to place standalone high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter units in all classrooms and learning environments. These units ensure particle filtration of air and improve air exchange. These units must be sized for the classroom or learning environment that is being used. In larger classrooms and learning environments, more than one HEPA unit may be required.

For schools with mechanical ventilation, the NCDSB is expected to place a standalone HEPA filter unit in every occupied Kindergarten classroom as an additional health and safety measure to recognize that Kindergarten students are not required to wear a mask in the classroom.

In addition, the NCDSB encourages and endorses outdoor education where possible and opening windows where this augments ventilation for classrooms and learning environments.

## VACCINATION

To support the return to school plan, the Ministry of Education intends to introduce a vaccination disclosure policy for all publicly-funded school board employees, and staff in private schools as well as for all staff in licensed child care settings for the 2021-2022 school year, with rapid antigen testing requirements for staff who are not immunized against COVID-19. More information and details are forthcoming.

The NCDSB will continue to work with the Porcupine and Timiskaming Health Units to reach out to families to promote vaccination.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND STUDENT SUPPORTS

### MENTAL HEALTH

The ordered school closure and remote learning strategy impacted our students and staff in different ways. We know that many students found this experience to be challenging in terms of their mental health and well-being.

Student mental health and well-being remains a top priority of the NCDSB, as good mental health is fundamental to a student's ability to learn and to succeed at school and in life.

The NCDSB will maintain a tiered approach to mental health that will support all student and target intensive help to those who have been most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NCDSB will focus on reaching all students to actively monitor attendance and engagement. The NCDSB will continue to work in partnership with community partnership to deliver culturally relevant supports for students.

All school based staff will participate in training modules available through School Mental Health Ontario. All mental health related support staff will be available to our students throughout the return to school process.

Parents/guardians with specific concerns in this regard, are encouraged to contact the school principal to discuss issues and solutions for their child's mental health and well-being.

Additional resources are available to our students and their families on our board website:  
<https://www.ncdsb.on.ca/mental-health-resources.php>

## STUDENT SUPPORTS

In-school programs will be available to all NCDSB students to help support a smooth transition, for students with special education needs.

The Students Services Department, under the direction of a Supervisory Officer, will consult with third party providers and community partners on the development of protocols to ensure that students continue to receive community-based health services. At a minimum, all community service providers will:

- i) confirm pre-arranged appointments with the Principal, except in emergency situations;
- ii) complete a COVID-19 self-screen and attest to the results;
- iii) wear a medical grade mask in the school;
- iv) report to the main office and complete the necessary sign-in requirements;
- v) use a designated space as assigned by the Principal and clean surfaces in between student appointments.

## SPECIFIC ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND REQUIREMENTS

### TEACHING, LEARNING AND DAILY SCHEDULES

#### Elementary

Teachers and support staff will be responsible for training students in health and safety practices as part of the daily routine. This may include but is not limited to: proper handwashing techniques, the safe removal and storage of masks, and physical distancing requirements.

Generally, the typical school day schedule will apply to all elementary schools during the 2021-2022 school year.

The school day will begin at 8:45 a.m.

The school day will end at 3:15 p.m.

Lunch and outdoor play will be from 11:30 – 12:30 each day.

There will be two (2) scheduled recess breaks for students in accordance with the *Education Act*.

Students are encouraged to arrive at school as close as possible to the school start time.

Upon arrival to school each morning, students will immediately proceed to their assigned classroom.

## **Secondary**

Students will participate in a two-day cycle, designed to minimize student movement in the school.

Day 1: Morning – Period 1 (150 minutes)  
Afternoon – Period 3 (150 minutes)

Day 2: Morning – Period 2 (150 minutes)  
Afternoon – Period 4 (150 minutes)

Upon arrival, students will avoid large gatherings and immediately proceed to their assigned classroom.

The school day will begin at 9:00 a.m.

There will be a one-hour lunch break from 11:30 – 12:30.

The school day will end at 3:00 p.m.

## **COOPERATIVE EDUCATION and ONTARIO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM (OYAP)**

All COOP and OYAP students will attend work placements, providing the appropriate health & safety measures are in place by the site employer.

Students will also complete a pre-placement preparation module that includes COVID-19 preparedness in the workplace.

Any required sector specific training certification will be provided prior to the work placement for OYAP students.

## **MUSIC**

Music programs are permitted in areas with adequate ventilation.

Singing and the use of wind instruments will be permitted:

- i) Use of wind instruments is permitted indoors within a cohort if a minimum distance of two metres or more can be maintained. As much distance as possible should be encouraged and use of large, well-ventilated spaces should be prioritized.
- ii) Use of wind instruments is permitted outdoors in mixed cohorts with distancing encouraged.
- iii) Singing is permitted indoors. Masking is encouraged but not required for singing indoors if a minimum distance of two metres can be maintained between cohorts and as much distancing as possible maintained within a cohort.

If shared, proper sanitization of wind instruments must occur between use.

## HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In elementary and secondary health and physical education courses, the use of gymnasiums, change rooms, weight rooms, indoor physical education equipment and shared outdoor equipment are permitted with distancing. High and low-contact activities are permitted indoors and outdoors are follows:

- Masking is not required when playing high or low contact activities outdoors.
- Masking is encouraged for indoor sports where they can be worn safely based on the activity.
- Windows should be opened when feasible to increase ventilation.

The NCDSB expects to receive further guidance on health and physical education and related extra-curricular activities. Modifications to the processes and expectations will be made accordingly and communicated in a timely manner.

## EDUCATIONAL EXCURSIONS

Day trips and overnight stays are permitted and should follow the relevant provincial requirements under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#). The NCDSB will adopt a gradual return to educational excursions.

The planning and delivery of educational excursions will be at the discretion of the Principal, in collaboration with the supervising staff members. The Principal will adhere to [NCDSB Policy E-19 Educational Excursions](#) and the attendant administrative procedures.

## EQAO

For the 2021-2022 school year, regular EQAO assessments for grades 3 and 6 will resume in the new digital format for math, reading, and writing.

Students in grade 9 math will write the Grade 9 math digital adaptive assessment and the result of the assessment may count towards up to 10% of the student's final mark.

EQAO assessments are required to be done in-person at the school.

Students learning remotely can choose to participate in EQAO assessments in-person, at the discretion of the local school community Principal as long as all applicable health and safety measures can be met.

## LITERACY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

The literacy graduation requirement is waived for students graduating in the 2021-2022 school year.

The literacy graduation requirement will be restored for students graduating in the 2022-2023 school year.

Students in grades 10 and 11 and non-graduating students, including those who are learning remotely, are required to work towards the literacy graduation requirement, through participation in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), adjudication or the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC).

The community involvement graduation requirement has been reduced from 40 hours to a minimum of 20 hours of community involvement activities for students graduating in the 2021-22 school year. Temporary changes to reduce barriers students may face to earn their community involvement hours and provide greater flexibility in how they earn their hours will continue for the 2021-22 school year. The community involvement graduation requirement of 40 hours will be restored in 2022-23 and students working towards their OSSD should be supported to meet these requirements in time for their graduating year.

## PIVOT PREPAREDNESS

Despite the very best efforts of the NCDSB, the Ministry of Education, and public health officials to keep schools open for the 2021-2022 school year, there is a need for all district school boards to be prepared for a potential closure. The NCDSB is reviewing the pivot plan from previous years. Revisions will be made accordingly to ensure that we can move to remote learning quickly in order to maintain continuity of learning for all students. As part of this planning, families will be surveyed on technology requirements required in the home, should a closure of a classroom, school, or system take place.

All teachers, including itinerant teachers, resource teachers and student success teachers, must create and maintain a *Brightspace* classroom to support their individual teaching assignments. All teachers must also work with students to train them on how to use the various tools and features within the virtual learning environment to ensure greater preparedness in the event of a pivot to remote learning.

## EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

### CLUBS

Clubs, activities, sport teams, bands and extra-curriculars are permitted. The NCDSB will use a gradual return to extra-curricular activities and clubs.

Cohorts may interact outdoors with physical distancing encouraged, and indoors with masking and appropriate physical distancing.

Direction in sections above on protective strategies and specific academic programs and requirements apply to all extra-curricular activities.

Measures for inter-school sport activities will follow the requirements in the health and physical education section above. Additional information is expected in the near future, and details will be provided accordingly:

- High and low-contact activities are permitted outdoors without masking.
- High and low-contact activities are permitted indoors. Masking is encouraged for indoor sports where they can be worn safely, based on the activity.

## **BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Schools, child care operators and authorized recreation providers in school must follow the guidance for before and after school programs.

The NCDSB will work closely with child care providers to ensure that programs remain available in designated schools. Families seeking child care services are encouraged to contact the provider directly to discuss availability of such programming.

## **COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS**

Community Use of Schools will resume with some restrictions and modifications in accordance with provincial guidelines and local public health provisions. The Community Use of Schools program will return gradually and with strict provisions in place. There may be limitations to community use of schools based on protocols, plans, and cleaning services available.

Any visitor to the school, including those involved in Community Use of Schools, are required to self-screen and to wear a mask while on school premises.

Schools and community groups will collaborate to ensure that student/visitor lists are maintained and readily available to be provided to local public health for contact tracing purposes in accordance with all applicable legislation.

## **PROTOCOLS FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND FIRE SAFETY**

For the 2021-2022 school year, it is essential to plan for procedures to conduct fire drills aligned with public health advice.

In accordance with the directive issued on August 3, 2021 from the Office of the Fire Marshall the following procedures will be used:

1. On the scheduled fire drill day, a one-time sounding of the fire alarm will occur in order to familiarize all students and staff with the sound of the fire alarm.
2. On the same day following item 1 above, evacuation of individual classrooms in a manner that is consistent with guidance provided by the Ministry of Education and public health officials. As only a few classrooms may be able to evacuate simultaneously, the total evacuation of the school may extend over the course of the school day. The teacher/supervisory person may use a cell phone ringer, a bell or a similar type of device to commence the individual classroom evacuation, at the scheduled time.

For clarity, these allowances are only for purposes of undertaking a total evacuation fire drill and only where needed to ensure compliance with public health guidance. Where a fire alarm sounds outside the scope of a planned fire drill, the total evacuation of the school shall proceed as per usual emergency procedures.

Lockdown drills will also be scheduled in accordance with the governing legislation and guidelines, while adhering to all public health measures and expectations.

## TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

*During the first three professional activities of the year, all staff will participate in a range of training sessions including but not limited to all health & safety protocols, addressing student mental health needs, remote learning strategies, and all related facility training to ensure a safe reopening of school for students.*

Public Health Ontario training videos:

[Handwashing](#)

[Hand Rub](#)

[Putting on gloves](#)

[Removing gloves](#)

[Putting on full PPE](#)

[Putting on mask and eye protection](#)

Facility Training (flow of traffic, logging access & movement, staggered schedules).

Use of the personal protective equipment (PPE) kit for emergency situations during the school day (the donning and doffing of PPE when attending to an individual who becomes ill).

## MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 IN SCHOOLS

### OVERVIEW OF OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

The operational guidance of this section applies to NCDSB schools, child care centres and before and after school programs that operate within NCDSB schools.

In the event of discrepancy between this guidance and a directive of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the directive prevails.

Though the focus of this guidance is on the updated health, safety, and operational measures that are required in order to safely reopen and operate schools, the NCDSB expects that every effort must continue



to be made to uphold the welcoming and caring environment that our schools provide to students and families.

## CASE DEFINITIONS

The Ministry of Health maintains case definitions for a probable case and a confirmed case of COVID-19. These definitions are maintained on the [Ontario Ministry of Health site](#) and are subject to updating. Please refer to this site for the most current version of these key definitions.

## OUTBREAK PROTOCOLS

As outlined in the Ministry of Health COVID-19 guidance: school case, contact, and outbreak management, an outbreak in a school is defined as two or more lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases in students or staff (or other visitors) in a school with an epidemiological link, within a 14-day period, where at least one case could have reasonably acquired their infection in the school (including transportation and before or after school care).

The local public health unit will work with the school to determine whether epidemiological links (for example, cases in the same class, cases that are part of the same before and after school care cohort, cases that have assigned bus seats in close proximity to each other) exist between cases and whether transmission may have occurred in the school. This document is maintained on the Ontario Ministry of Health's [COVID 19: Guidance for the health sector](#) site, and is subject to updating.

Additionally, the local public health unit (PHU) is responsible for:

- determining if an outbreak exists
- declaring an outbreak
- providing direction on outbreak control measures to be implemented
- declaring that an outbreak is over

The public health unit will determine which cohort(s) may be sent home (for self-isolation) in response to a case, an outbreak or if full school closure is required based on the extent of an outbreak.

In some instances, the local public health unit may give school principals discretion, if necessary, to dismiss individuals or cohorts while awaiting the results of the public health investigation.

An outbreak can be declared over, when:

- at least 14 days have passed with no evidence of ongoing transmission that could reasonably be related to exposures in the school
- no further ill or symptomatic individuals have been reported by the school who are associated with the initial exposed cohorts

## PREVENTION AND OUTBREAK RESPONSIBILITIES

Schools are responsible for reporting:

- a confirmed COVID-19 case associated with the school to the local public health unit and to the Ministry of Education through the daily reporting tool where they have become aware of such a case;
- occupational illness to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, as well as to the workplace joint health and safety committee, the worker's labour union (if any), and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB);
- absenteeism to the public health unit and to the Ministry of Education through the daily reporting tool, in accordance with provincial and local public health unit direction.

Local public health units are responsible for:

- determining if an outbreak in a school exists
- managing the outbreak in collaboration with the school and other relevant partners
- providing direction on when cohorts of students can return to school or when the school can reopen
- conducting case and contact management activities

Measures will be taken to ensure privacy and avoid disclosure of details to the school community that would lead to identification of a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case.

Note: an outbreak does not necessarily need to be declared over for the public health unit to recommend that the school reopen to some/all cohorts. Based on advice from the public health unit, cohorts without evidence of transmission can be gradually brought back to school as additional information and test results become available. Basic preventive measures must be reinforced, and consideration should be given to implementing additional preventive measures and active surveillance as part of reopening.

## ROLE OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND SCHOOL BOARDS

School administrators and school boards will :

- implement prevention measures found in guidance from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and their local public health unit this includes having an accessible process in place to implement on-site screening procedures, as effectively as possible;
- cooperate and coordinate with the local public health unit, and other stakeholders as required.
- communicate with early years partners about COVID-19 in schools and the school board.
- maintain accurate records of staff, students and visitors for the last 30 days.
- provide public health units with the name(s) and contact information of a designated point of contact for use during and/or after business hours, to ensure timely investigation and follow up cases, contacts and outbreaks (for example, classroom, bus, before and after school programs, extra-curricular activities).

This information will include up-to-date attendance records for all common school locations attended by staff and students, and transportation seating charts (where applicable), and contact information for those groups. This information should be provided to the public health unit as soon as possible, and within 24 hours of request to ensure timely follow-up.

In general, schools should not report all instances of ill individuals in the school setting to the public health unit as these are frequent occurrences and typically students have non-specific symptoms. However, as required by *section 28 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act*, school principals are required to report to the medical officer of health if they are of the opinion that a pupil has or may have a communicable disease. As such, principals should contact their local public health unit if they have concerns about COVID-19 student related absences or attendance concerns within their school community.

The local public health unit may be consulted if there are questions about the management of individuals with symptoms, environmental cleaning, and other measures as necessary.

In collaboration with the public health unit, communicate proactively with the school community about COVID-19 prevention measures and about how symptomatic or asymptomatic individuals, cases, and outbreaks will be handled.

School administrators and boards will develop and implement a communication plan, in collaboration with the local public health unit, for managing concerns in the school setting, and use this proactively and responsively as needed in schools.

Training with respect to outbreak prevention and control measures, including IPAC measures and the use of PPE will be provided to school staff.

## COMMUNICATING WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

As required, the NCDSB will use the COVID-19 advisory section on the website to clearly post information and updates regarding confirmed cases of COVID-19 that involve a student or a staff member in a school setting.

No personal or identifying information will be made public. As cases for students or staff members are resolved, the NCDSB will update the website to remove information about these cases.

If public health advises that a class, cohort, or a school will be closed for a period of time, families, students and staff will be notified immediately.

Notice of any closures of classes, cohorts or schools will be posted on the COVID-19 advisory section of the NCDSB website.

## REPORTING COVID-19 ABSENCES IN SCHOOLS

The NCDSB and its schools must report on a daily basis any confirmed cases of COVID-19 to the Ministry of Education via the school absence online reporting tool (ART). COVID-19 board leads must verify the accuracy of this information.

## MANAGEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS EXPOSED TO COVID-19

*Specific scenarios and recommended actions for each of the sections below can be found in [COVID-19: Health, safety and operational guidance for schools \(2021-2022\)](#).*

### MANAGEMENT OF ILL OR SYMPTOMATIC INDIVIDUALS IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

***This section applies to students, staff or other members or visitors to the school community, who become ill during the school day and on school premises.***

With any symptoms of illness – COVID-19 related or not – sick individuals should stay home and seek assessment from their regular healthcare provider if required.

All individuals are expected to screen every day before attending school. Any staff, student, or visitor that does not pass the screening will not be able to attend school. At the advice of the local public health unit, schools and school boards may choose to implement additional screening measures based on local circumstances.

Students should be made aware, in age-appropriate and non-stigmatizing language, how to identify symptoms of COVID-19 and should be instructed to speak to a staff member immediately if they feel ill.

Schools should maintain a personal protective equipment (PPE) kit specifically for managing students or others who become ill during school hours. Staff will be trained to use this kit.

**A list of students and staff in the school who were in contact with or in the same cohort as the ill individual should be prepared.** The local public health unit will provide any further direction on testing and isolation of exposed contacts as relevant.

### MANAGEMENT OF INDIVIDUALS EXPOSED TO COVID-19 OUTSIDE OF A SCHOOL SETTING

***This section applies to individuals closely related to the school community, such as bus drivers, parents or members of a student's or staff member's household, who test positive for COVID-19 outside of the school.***

Situations will arise where students, staff, essential visitors, or contractors or teachers may be exposed to COVID-19 outside of the school environment (for example, to family members that do not attend the school, social contacts outside of school).

Individuals who are not fully immunized or previously positive and have been identified as a high-risk close contact of a COVID-19 case, such as household members, will not attend school. These individuals must follow directions from the PHU on testing and self-isolation.

In general, isolation and testing of a cohort may not be necessary if the student or staff acquired the infection outside of the school setting and did not attend school while communicable. This will be determined by the local public health unit.

The NCDSB will expect that schools have necessary arrangements in place to support continuity of learning for students who require isolation as well as their siblings who may also be required to isolate by virtue of being a high-risk close contact.

#### MANAGEMENT OF A CONFIRMED DIAGNOSIS OF COVID-19 IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

***This section applies to a student, staff member or a member of a school community who is regularly in the school, who informs the school that they have tested positive for COVID-19.***

- Every individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 will be contacted by their local public health unit for further directions.
- Any individual who tests positive for COVID-19 must isolate and cannot attend school until they are cleared by their local public health unit. Note that individuals do not need to provide a medical note or proof of a negative result to return to school.
- The local public health unit will notify the school of a positive COVID-19 diagnosis. In some cases, the local public health unit may not be the same local public health unit as the school and in these circumstances, coordination between the health units and the school is required for further direction. Having designated points of contact within the school and the public health unit can assist with ensuring clear processes for communication are in place.
- Where the local public health unit determines there was a transmission risk to others in the school, students and staff will be assessed by the local public health unit to determine their risk of exposure and whether they will require testing and isolation.
- Classroom cohorts (students and staff affiliated with the cohort) will generally be considered at high risk of exposure.
- All students and staff who are identified as high risk close contacts should get tested regardless of their immunization status. In general, individuals who are fully immunized or previously positive will not require isolation, unless otherwise directed by the local public health unit.
- A negative test result does not alter or shorten the isolation duration as they may still be incubating the virus.

#### RETURN TO SCHOOL

Individuals who have had a COVID-19 test because of symptoms but who test negative can return to school if they do not have a fever, if their symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours, or 48 hours for gastrointestinal (GI) (nausea/vomiting, diarrhea) symptoms, if they have not been directed to self-isolate and provided they have had no contact to a confirmed case of COVID-19.

Where an individual has tested positive for COVID-19, the local public health unit will be in contact with the school to provide further direction for both the individual and their high risk close contacts, including household members. The individual cannot return to school until cleared by the local public health unit.

If the individual with symptoms is not tested, they must self-isolate (including from household members) for a period of 10 days. Whether they are tested or not, the period of self-isolation will start from the date of symptom on-set.

Individuals who have traveled out of the country are required to follow federal guidelines and law upon their return.

Note that individuals do not need to provide a medical note or proof of negative result to return to school.

For an ill individual who has a known alternative diagnosis provided by a health care professional, return to school can occur if they do not have a fever and their symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours or 48 hours if vomiting or diarrhea. Individuals will still need to use the [COVID-19 school and child care screening tool](#), or a screening tool designated by the local public health unit, daily before attending school and may also be required to provide confirmation of self-screening prior to or upon arrival to school.

## RECORDS MANAGEMENT

### WORKING WITH THE LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT

In the event that schools are made aware of a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 for staff or students, it is essential that key information pertaining to staff and students be available upon request by the local public health unit for the purposes of contact tracing.

This information needs to be accessible by school administrators on short notice, both during and outside of school hours, when requested by the public health unit. The NCDSB COVID-19 board lead is expected to establish a system with their local public health units to ensure that these records can be accessed at all times.

The following information will be available, as soon as possible, and within 24 hours of the health unit request:

- attendance records
- class lists and seating charts
- before-and-after child care lists, if applicable
- transportation lists and seating charts
- up to date contact information for parents, staff and students
- special assignments and/or programs (for example, Special Education, COOP)
- records of essential visitors

**CLOSING NOTE:**

**This plan is subject to change based on the advice of public health officials and all related regulations or expectations of the Ministry of Education.**

Version 2: August 17, 2021