

August 13, 2020

Parent/Guardian Frequently Asked Questions

Does my child need to wear a mask during all hours of the day?

- Wearing a mask will be encouraged throughout schools when physical distancing is not possible.
- Students (Grade 5 and up), teachers, staff, visitors, and volunteers are strongly recommended to wear non-medical masks in common areas and where physical distancing of two metres is not possible. Students under Grade 5 can also use non-medical masks.
- There may be times throughout the day that students will have sufficient space to be physically distanced so that masks can be removed, such as during lunch breaks or mask-free play outdoors at recess.
- Masks will be provided at the school if needed. Non-medical masks will be added on the school supply list as well.

Can my school mandate masks if the department is strongly recommending them?

- No. The goal is to create as much provincial consistency as possible, specifically when it comes to public health advice.
- Recommendations may change over time. Public health officials make recommendations based on a number of factors, including the rates of infection and/or transmission in the community.

Does my child need to wear a mask on the bus?

- Yes. Students in Grade 5 and up are required to wear medical masks before they are allowed on the bus and while they are on it.
- A mask will be provided for them if they do not have one.
- Students in Grade 4 and lower will not be required to wear a mask, but they can wear a non-medical mask if they choose.

Will my child have to share a seat on the bus?

- Specific guidelines for school transportation have been developed and updated as the public health information evolves.
- Where possible, there will be one student per seat. Students who are seated together will be members of the same family or members of the same cohorts in the school.

Will the bus driver wear a mask?

- Yes. Drivers are also required to wear a mask.

Does my child need to wear a mask in the hallways?

- Although school divisions are working to reduce hallway traffic and reduce congestion in common areas, it is strongly recommended that students in Grade 5 and up wear non-medical masks in common areas and where physical distancing is not always possible.
- Students in Grade 4 and lower may wear a mask if they choose.
- Teachers and staff will also wear masks when in common areas and when physical distancing is not possible.

Does my child need to wear a mask in their classroom during regular class time?

- If a school is able to accommodate two metres of physical distancing in a classroom, no.
- If students are in close proximity to each other, such as moving around the classroom and away from their desks, non-medical masks are strongly recommended for Grades 5 and up. For students Grade 4 and lower, non-medical masks can be worn if desired.
- Measures are being put in place in the classroom to ensure that there is safe, mask-free time throughout the day, in consultation with public health officials.

What if my child loses their mask at school?

- Schools will provide masks to students and staff who need them.
- Schools will also have a supply of non-medical and medical masks on hand.

Does wearing a mask mean that other public health measures can be reduced?

- No. Wearing non-medical masks is an **additional layer of protection** that can help to prevent the infectious respiratory droplets of an unknowingly infected person (the wearer) from coming into contact with other people. This follows public health advice that a mask may be a helpful tool to reduce the risk of infection or transmission when an individual cannot be two metres from others.

Who should not wear masks?

- Non-medical masks should not be worn by anyone who
 - is unable to remove the mask without assistance (for example, due to age, ability, or developmental status)

- has breathing difficulties
- is under the age of 2

What happens if there is a case in a school?

- Public health officials will lead the response if there is a positive case in a school. This will mean contacting those who would be considered close contacts and advising them of the need to self-isolate or self-monitor.
- Schools will clean and disinfect areas that public health deems required, and the space will not be used until it is determined to be safe.
- Information will be shared with parents in those schools when a case has been identified.
- Schools will be identified in the Manitoba COVID-19 Bulletin when a case has been identified.

Will they close my school if a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

- Not unless there is evidence of transmission across multiple cohorts.
- Public health measures that reduce the contact between groups of students will allow for individual classes or cohorts to be excluded from school and advised to self-isolate at home, instead of the entire school. Classes or cohorts that are not exposed can continue to attend school. If there is evidence of transmission between cohorts in the school, the school may be closed and switch to remote learning for a period of time.

How will schools help my child adjust to going back to school when it will look so different?

- Schools and school divisions are all planning strategies to respond to the mental health and well-being needs of their students, staff, and families, and they will be posting plans on their websites by August 17 so that you can access them.

How can I talk to my child about COVID-19?

- Provide reassurance to children and youth about their personal safety and health. Telling children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting for them. Reassure them about their safety, and explain that there are many things they can do to stay healthy. Seek out credible resources and information.
- For more information on talking to children about COVID-19, please see the following resources provided by UNICEF and the World Health Organization:
 - UNICEF
www.unicef.org/coronavirus/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-covid-19-school-return
 - World Health Organization
www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/healthy-parenting/english-tip-6-covid-19-parenting.pdf?sfvrsn=232558c1_8

Will my child's temperature be taken when they arrive at school?

- No. Parents and caregivers will need to screen their children before sending them to school.
- Schools may also support children with self-screening, but temperature checks at school are not recommended. Normal temperatures are different for everybody and can vary throughout the day.

Will teachers have access to fast-tracked COVID-19 testing?

- Currently there is no fast-tracking for any essential workers beyond health care.
- Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and should be tested for COVID-19. If the COVID-19 test result is negative, they should stay home until symptoms have resolved for 24 hours. If not tested, all individuals with symptoms should isolate at home for 10 days after symptom onset.
- If anyone is identified as a close contact to a case, they will be required to self-isolate for 14 days due to exposure, regardless of whether their COVID-19 test is negative.

Will students with special needs be in congregated classrooms? Isn't this a step backwards from the department's philosophy of inclusion?

- The goal is to have as many students back to in-class learning as possible, including students with special learning needs.
- School is going to be different for everyone this fall, including students with special needs—many of whom may not be able to stay home independently if parents are working.
- Grouping some students together and getting creative about programming and timetabling is a temporary COVID-19 measure that is intended to get kids back in school as much as possible.

Will my child's choral program run this year?

- As there are no specific interventions that eliminate the risk from these group activities at this time, it is difficult to provide specific guidance for choral or for wind instruments. Schools may consider cancelling these activities for the upcoming year or, initially, for the fall term, as further evidence on their risk becomes available. If music programs continue, they must implement additional measures as recommended in *Guidelines for Vocalists and Instrumentalists* at www.gov.mb.ca/asset_library/en/covid/restoring-vocalists-instrumentalists.pdf.

Where can I get information on my specific school?

- Detailed school division plans will be posted by August 17. This will include information on
 - the school-day structure and learning plan
 - how the school division will that ensure public health orders and guidance are followed

- how the school division will address the mental health and well-being of the school community, including teachers, staff, students, and families
- how information will be communicated to students, staff, and families
- Before the start of the school year, schools will communicate directly with parents and caregivers to provide them with information about the school year and about ongoing plans for instruction and supports.

Where can I get more information?

- More information on Manitoba Education's COVID-19 response, including resources, planning documents, and frequently asked questions, can be found at *Latest COVID-19 Education News* at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html.
- You can also visit EngageMB at <https://engagemb.ca/welcoming-our-students-back-restoring-safe-schools> to ask questions. We'll share your question and the answer for others to see. Questions can also be answered privately if they are not appropriate for sharing.
- *My Learning at Home* is a resource to assist families to support their children in remote learning from home. It can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/mylearning/learningathome/index.html.
- Current information about COVID-19 in Manitoba can be found at www.manitoba.ca/covid19/.