
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2020PREM0026-000890
May 15, 2020

Office of the Premier
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Children and Family Development

K-12 students to have optional in-class instruction on June 1

VICTORIA – Parents will have the choice of bringing their children back to class on a part-time basis this school year as part of BC’s Restart Plan, with the goal of returning to full-time classes in September 2020, provided it is safe to do so.

“British Columbians have worked hard to flatten our curve. As we move into the next phase of our pandemic plan after the May long weekend, the science shows us that we’re ready to bring students back to school safely on a gradual and part-time basis,” said Premier John Horgan. “This will be welcome news for many families who have struggled to adjust to remote and online learning, and for parents who are going back to work. At every step, we will move slowly and make health and safety our top priority. B.C. has done well under the guidance of our provincial health officials, and now is the time to take this next step together.”

To make sure schools are safe for students and staff, the number of students in school each day will be reduced, with most receiving in-class instruction part time. School districts will determine scheduling for classes and transportation arrangements. For kindergarten to Grade 5, this means most students will go to school half time (such as alternating days), while grades 6 to 12 will go to school about one day a week. Children of essential service workers and students needing additional supports will have the option to attend school full time. Families that decide not to send their children to class may continue learning from home.

“School is the place where kids learn how to connect with others and grow together, and it’s incredibly important for students who need extra support to get more time with their teachers and support workers,” said Rob Fleming, Minister of Education. “We’ve looked at what measures other jurisdictions are putting in place and we’re taking direction from our provincial health officials, so students, educators and staff know we’re taking every precaution to protect their health and safety.”

Health and safety

All boards of education and independent school authorities will be required to implement strict provincial health officer and WorkSafeBC health and safety measures to reduce the risk COVID-19 transmission, including:

- desks spaced apart and avoiding groups or gatherings of students in hallways or other common areas;
- regular cleaning of high-contact surfaces like door knobs, toilet seats, keyboards and desks at least twice a day, and cleaning the school building at least once a day;
- students, educators and staff will be required to clean their hands before entering school

property, and there will be more hand-sanitizing and cleaning stations available, with well-stocked supplies;

- staggered drop-offs, lunch and recess breaks, with increased outside time;
- staff and students (or their parents/guardians) must assess themselves daily for symptoms of COVID-19. If any student or staff member has even mild symptoms, arrangements will be made for that person to be returned home;
- one student per seat on school buses, unless children are from the same house, with plexiglass separating the bus driver from students; and
- students or employees should not share food or personal items like phones, pens or pencils. Clear protocols also need to be in place for the safe and healthy handling of all food items.

Gradual approach

The Ministry of Education has developed a five-stage approach to operate schools, depending on risk of transmission. Schools will also have plans in place for each stage, ensuring they are ready to make changes if there is a risk of transmission, a second wave or a community outbreak.

Each school district and independent school must have its return-to-class and safety plans approved by the ministry before moving to the next stage, and they will be posted on each district's websites for families to access. The ministry will support boards of education and independent school authorities in building these plans and operations during the pandemic will be regularly monitored.

Since returning to class is voluntary and most students will be attending part time, school leaders will be contacting families to make arrangements for children to return to in-class instruction. If parents have not heard from their schools by May 22, 2020, they are asked to contact their principal. Parents and caregivers are advised to follow the schedule provided for their child to ensure a safe and orderly restart.

Child care

Many child care centres have continued to operate safely throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to support essential service workers in communities across B.C.

Updated health and safety guidelines for child care settings released by the provincial health officer will support child care centres that were closed to reopen safely as they are able, and will reassure parents as they return to work that their children will be cared for in a safe environment.

Information from the BC Centre for Disease Control states the COVID-19 virus has a very low infection rate in children. As well, children are not the primary drivers of COVID-19 spread in child care facilities, schools or in community settings. Like schools, child care centres will need to take additional precautions to maintain the health and safety of their employees and the children they are caring for.

“We know that parents will continue to make the right child care decisions for their family, based on their individual circumstances and providers will do the same for their centres and the child care professionals who work there,” said Katrina Chen, Minister of State for Child

Care. “While we are giving the necessary tools to child care centres to operate safely, it is ultimately the choice of parents and providers.”

New provincial health officer guidelines for safely providing childcare include:

- maintaining the physical space requirements set out in the Child Care Licensing Regulation. Child care centres have sufficient space to support physical distancing between staff without reducing the number of children in care at any one time.
- organizing children into smaller groups and/or spreading children out to minimize direct physical contact.
- cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces at least twice a day. General cleaning of the centre should occur at least once a day with common cleaning and disinfectant products.
- Setting up hand-hygiene stations at the entrance, so that children can clean their hands when they enter. If a sink with soap and water is not available, provide hand sanitizer but keep out of children’s reach and supervise its use. Additional hand-hygiene opportunities should be built into the daily schedule.
- staggering the timings of pick-up and drop-off. A daily check at drop-off may be conducted by asking parents and caregivers to confirm that their child does not have symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other respiratory disease. There is no role for screening children or staff for specific symptoms, checking temperatures, or COVID-19 testing. Such activities are reserved for health-care professionals.
- having children outside often, including for learning activities, snack time and play time.
- ensuring each child has their own individual meal or snack. Reusable utensils must be cleaned and sanitized after each use.
- asking parents and caregivers to only bring personal comfort items (e.g., stuffies) if they are clean and can be laundered at the end of each day.

These guidelines will be complemented by Work Safe guidelines for child care providers, which will be released next week.

Working together

As B.C. takes steps towards a recovery by removing some of the restrictions, employers are encouraged to be flexible when it comes to arrangements for parents of school-age students.

The Ministry of Education is working with all 60 school districts, independent school authorities, First Nations schools, teachers, school leaders, support staff, public health officials and all its education partners to co-ordinate the next steps for accommodating more students in class.

“As we look to create our new normal, reopening our schools to in-class learning is an important step,” said Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.’s provincial health officer. “It will look different, but will be done in way that is safe for everyone. I want to assure all the staff, students and families that we will face the challenges that come with this transition together – and we will do it in a measured and thoughtful way.”

Quick Facts:

- There are about 5,000 students already in classrooms, including children of essential

service workers and those who require extra support.

- Government has invested over \$90 million to support more than 2,600 child care centres to remain open and more than 1,400 centres that have closed so they can reopen in the future.
- Science and research show that children under 19 are at low risk of transmitting COVID-19 and suspending schools only has modest impacts in minimizing the spread of the virus.
- The Ministry of Children and Family Development is providing temporary emergency funding to assist licensed child centres to stay open, even with reduced enrolment, and to assist centres that temporarily close with fixed costs so they can re-open and serve families when able.
- Temporary emergency funding will continue to be in place and assessed on a go forward basis, as schools and businesses reopen.

Learn More:

For more information on health and safety standards for K-12 schools, plus accurate, timely information about schools, programs and educational services, including regularly updated frequently asked questions in multiple languages, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/SafeSchools

More information on health and safety standards for child care, plus the latest COVID-19 related child care information is available at: www.gov.bc.ca/ChildCareCovid-19Response

WorkSafe BC information:

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/create-manage/joint-health-safety-committees>

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/posters/help-prevent-spread-covid-19-handwashing?lang=en>

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/create-manage/managing-risk/controlling-risks>

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/create-manage/rights-responsibilities>

For the latest medical updates, including case counts, prevention, risks and testing, visit:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/>

Or follow @CDCofBC on Twitter.

For the provincial health officer's orders, notices and guidance, visit:

www.gov.bc.ca/phoguidance

For non-health related information, including financial, child care and education supports, travel, transportation and essential service information, visit: www.gov.bc.ca/Covid-19

Four backgrounders follow.

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BACKGROUND 1

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What people are saying about reopening schools

Quotes:

Stephanie Higginson, president, BC School Trustees Association –

“Getting students back into classrooms is the best way to grow their learning and maintain their connections to friends, teachers, school staff and the wider community. In-class instruction also ensures that students who need extra support receive it. As we enter into our new normal, we must strive to have students in school buildings whenever it is safe to do so. All school plans will be based on the most up-to-date health and safety protocols to keep students, staff and families learning safely in every community in British Columbia.”

Andrea Sinclair, president, BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) –

“BCCPAC is certainly pleased that Premier Horgan has made the decision to reopen schools for all students in British Columbia. Parents are truly appreciative that a return to the classroom is voluntary and that while many parents will be sending their children back to their neighbourhood school, a significant number will continue with remote learning and re-evaluate as we head into the new school year. I have had numerous discussions with Minister Fleming and it is clear that the parents’ voice has been heard.”

Paul Faoro, president, CUPE BC –

“The government’s approach to fighting this pandemic has been focused, comprehensive and effective from day one of this public health emergency, and the supportive response of British Columbians has been amazing, helping make reopening schools possible. Obviously, the health and safety of K-12 workers and students is the top priority for everyone, and I want to acknowledge all our CUPE K-12 locals and all the partners in education across the province for the work they’re doing to ensure our members — and all education workers — can help reopen schools and make them the welcoming, inclusive and safe places they need to be.”

Jennifer Charlesworth, B.C. representative for children and youth –

“Schools and their teachers play an important role in keeping children and youth healthy and safe, in addition to meeting their educational needs. B.C. educators have worked hard to stay connected with their students and to support online learning. We are grateful to them and to the parents and caregivers who have encouraged their children’s ongoing learning and development. However, we have been concerned about the pandemic’s impact on children and youth who have lost access to the additional encouragement, support people and resources that are only available within school settings. I am very pleased that students who benefit from

additional support will soon be able to return.”

Angela Clancy, executive director, Family Support Institute –

“The Family Support Institute is encouraged by the level of engagement and transparency the Ministry of Education has provided to stakeholders and families during this pandemic. As the return to in-class instruction unfolds across the province, we look forward to continued consultation to ensure families’ and students needs are met, and supports are provided with inclusion, equity and safety at the forefront of all decisions. We will continue to support families to seek equity and accountability in the education system for their children and look forward to working in partnership with all education stakeholders as we seek quality learning for all students.”

Sandra Menzer, chair, Provincial Child Care Council –

“We recognize and honour the important work that front-line child care providers are doing through these unprecedented times and we commend government for providing temporary emergency funding to ensure that these critical services will be there to support our communities as schools reopen and B.C.’s recovery plan is rolled out.”

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BACKGROUND 2

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Ministry of Education

Health and safety measures for educators, staff and students

The delivery of education during the pandemic is guided by the following principles from the Ministry of Education:

- Ensure a healthy and safe environment for all students, families and employees.
- Provide the services needed to support children of essential workers.
- Support vulnerable students who may need special assistance.
- Provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

Updated health and safety measures are intended to support all K-12 employees, students, parents, administrators and school community members to be informed and feel safe in schools, while understanding their roles and responsibilities. Boards should also provide ongoing orientation and training as needed, to ensure everyone in school buildings are well informed of safety protocols.

Mass gatherings

While the provincial health officer's order continues to prohibit gatherings of people in excess of 50 people, this does not apply to regular school activities, provided there are no more than 50 people in one area and they are practicing physical distancing. Large assemblies of students will not be permitted.

Self-isolate and quarantine

If anyone entering school property has common cold, influenza or COVID-19-like symptoms, they must stay home and be tested for COVID-19. Clear policies must also be in place to ensure anyone experiencing these symptoms are isolated and sent home. They should follow directions provided by their health-care provider and self-isolate at home for 14 days, or until test results show they do not have COVID-19 or another communicable illness. If there is a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19, contact tracing will be done to find out if it is a part of a cluster of cases or a local outbreak.

Cleaning protocols

Rigorous cleaning and disinfecting should be done according to the following guidelines:

- General cleaning and disinfecting of the premises should occur at least once a day.
- Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day.
- These include door knobs, light switches, toilets, tables, desks, chairs, keyboards and toys.
- Clean and disinfect any surface that is visibly dirty.

- Use common, commercially-available detergents and disinfectant products and closely follow the instructions on the label.
- Limit items that are not easily cleaned (e.g., fabric or soft items).
- Empty garbage containers daily.
- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids (e.g., runny nose, vomit, stool, urine). Wash hands before wearing and after removing gloves.
- Provide paper hand towels rather than hand dryers and disable water fountains.

Hygiene

Clear hygiene protocols will be in place for employees, students and others entering and exiting schools, for school outdoor activities and student pick-up and drop-off. Hand-hygiene stations should be set up at the school entrance, so everyone can clean their hands before they enter school property. Additional hand-hygiene opportunities should also be incorporated throughout the daily school schedule.

If sinks are not available, alcohol-based hand rub should contain at least 60% alcohol. Soap and water are preferred if hands are visibly dirty. Hand sanitizing supplies should be well-stocked at all times including soap, paper towels and, when needed, alcohol-based hand rub with a minimum of 60% alcohol.

Clear protocols also need to be in place for the safe and healthy handling of all food items. Students or employees should not share food or personal items like phones, pens or pencils. Parents and staff should teach and reinforce these practices among students.

Physical distancing

Younger students should be supported to have minimized physical contact with one another, while older students and adults should seek to maintain a safe physical distance whenever possible. Everyone should avoid hugs and handshakes and ensure students are reminded to keep their hands to themselves.

Classroom and learning environment layouts should be adjusted to allow distance between students and adults. When needed, there should be staggered pick-up and drop-off times, recess, snack and movements in the halls or other areas of the school building between classes. Steps should be taken to minimize the number of parents and caregivers or other non-staff adults entering school buildings.

Each board should work with their local municipalities to develop a common approach to opening playgrounds that follows the advice of the provincial health officer.

Transportation

Buses used for transporting students should be cleaned and disinfected. All buses must have a physical barrier between the driver and passengers, such as plexiglass. Students should have their own seat and be separated by two metres, when possible, unless the children live in the same household.

Respiratory etiquette

Students and staff should cough or sneeze into their elbow sleeve or a tissue and throw away

used tissues and immediately perform hand hygiene. Everyone should be encouraged to refrain from touching their eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.

Personal protective equipment

Students and staff will not be encouraged to wear non-medical masks. However, wearing a mask is a personal choice, and anyone who chooses to do so should be treated respectfully.

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BACKGROUND 3

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Ministry of Education

Five-stage approach for K-12 education during pandemic

The Ministry of Education has developed a five-stage approach: Stage 1 represents all students in all grades learning in the classroom, while still abiding by strict health and safety guidelines. Stage 5 represents a full suspension of all in-class instruction.

B.C. schools are currently at Stage 4, with close to 5,000 children of essential service workers and students with complex needs or those who require extra support receiving in-class instruction. In June, there will be a transition from Stage 4 to Stage 3 – where in-class learning is expanded for all students, while remote and online learning options continue to be available.

The aim is to begin school in September at Stage 1, if the risk of transmission is low and with the support of the provincial health officer. If there is an outbreak or a second wave in the 2020-21 school year, schools can move in and out of each of the stages to ensure the safety of students, their families and employees, while maintaining continuity of learning.

Education stages for K-12 students:

Stage 5

- Suspend all in-class instruction for all grades and students.
- Remote and online learning for all students.

Stage 4 (current stage)

- In-class learning for children of essential service workers, students with disabilities and students who require additional support, five days a week.
- Remote and online learning continues for most students.

Stage 3

- In-class learning for children of essential service workers, students with disabilities and students who require additional support, five days a week.
- Kindergarten to Grade 5 – part time, two to three days a week, with 50% of students at a time in schools.
- Grades 6-12 – one day per week, with 20% of students at a time in schools.
- Remote and online learning continues to be available for students.
- Parent/caregiver choice to return to in-class instruction.

Stage 2

- In-class learning for children of essential service workers, students with disabilities and students who require additional support – five days a week.

- In-class learning for all students in elementary school (kindergarten to Grade 7) on a full-time basis.
- In-class learning for secondary students (grades 8 to 12) on a part-time basis, with 40% of students at a time in schools.
- Remote and online learning continues to be available for secondary students.

Stage 1

- A return to full in-class instruction five days a week, while continuing to follow strict health and safety guidelines.

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BACKGROUND 4

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Ministry of Children and Family Development

Child care health, safety standards

Based on the current epidemiology of COVID-19 in B.C., and the fact that children are at a much lower risk of developing COVID-19, the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) advises child care providers should be encouraged to remain open or reopen, while supporting the health and safety of children and adults. Child care services should adapt as much as possible to implement public health and infection prevention and control measures, including staying home when ill, physical distancing, minimized physical contact, hand hygiene, frequent cleaning and disinfection, as described in this guidance.

Child care services are also encouraged to update their policies for children or staff who have symptoms of a common cold, influenza, COVID-19 or other infectious respiratory diseases to remain at home. Children or staff may return to the centre once they are assessed by their family physician or nurse practitioner and it is determined that they do not have COVID-19, and their symptoms have resolved.

COVID-19 and children

According to the BCCDC, the COVID-19 virus has a very low infection rate in children. In B.C., less than 1% of children and youth tested have been COVID-19 positive. Most children are not at high risk for COVID-19 infection. However, children under one year of age, and older children with immune suppression and medical complexity are considered more vulnerable and at higher risk for illness. While children who are considered more vulnerable can attend child care, parents and caregivers are encouraged to consult with their health-care provider to determine if their child should attend child care if they are uncertain.

Children and youth typically have much milder symptoms of COVID-19. Many children have asymptomatic disease. However, there is no conclusive evidence that children who are asymptomatic pose a risk to other children or to adults. Evidence indicates transmission involving children is primarily limited to household settings and from COVID-19 positive adults to children. Children are not the primary drivers of COVID-19 spread in child care facilities, schools or in community settings.

Cleaning protocols

- General cleaning and disinfecting of the centre should occur at least once a day.
- Frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day. These include door knobs, light switches, faucet handles, table counters, chairs, electronic devices, and toys.
- Use of common, commercially-available detergents and disinfectant products is advised. Toys and other items that cannot be easily cleaned (e.g., avoid plush/stuffed toys) should

be removed.

- Garbage containers must be emptied daily, at minimum.
- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids (e.g., runny nose, vomit, stool, urine).
- Clean and disinfect cots and cribs after each use, and launder crib linens between children. If parents are providing their own crib linen, the linens should be laundered and placed in a sealed plastic or washable bag before bringing to the centre. Do not shake the linens.
- Clean diapering stations after each use.

Hygiene

Hand hygiene stations should be set up at the entrance, so children can clean their hands when they enter. If a sink with soap and water is not available, provide hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, but keep it out of children's reach and supervise its use. Additional hand hygiene opportunities should be built into the daily schedule.

Centres should ensure they are always well-stocked with hand-washing supplies, including plain soap, clean towels, paper towels, waste bins, and where appropriate, hand sanitizer. As children regularly forget about proper hand washing, staff and children should practise often and staff should model washing hands properly in a fun and relaxed way. Staff should also help young children with hand hygiene as needed.

Children should be shown and encouraged to cough or sneeze into their elbow sleeve or a tissue. Used tissues must be thrown away and children should then immediately perform hand hygiene. Practicing "hands below your shoulders" will help young children not to touch their eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands. Parents and staff can teach and reinforce these practices amongst children. Cloth/homemade masks are not recommended.

Children and staff should not share food, drinks, soothers, bottles, sippy cups, toothbrushes, facecloths, and other personal items. If meals or snacks are provided, children must have their own individual meal or snack. Reusable utensils must be cleaned and sanitized after each use. Snack or meal time should be staggered to allow spacing between children during meals. Parents and caregivers should only bring personal comfort items (e.g., stuffies) if they are clean and can be laundered at the end of each day.

Physical distancing

Staff should minimize the frequency of direct physical contact with children and encourage children to minimize physical contact with each other. Staff should also maintain physical distancing from one another. Younger children should be supported to have minimized direct contact with one another, while older children should be supported to maintain physical distance whenever possible. Children from the same household (e.g., siblings) do not need to maintain physical distance from each other.

Physical distancing strategies include: avoiding hugs and handshakes, regularly reminding children to keep "hands to yourself" and minimizing the number of different staff that interact with the same children throughout the day.

Children may be organized into smaller groups and/or spread out to minimize direct physical

contact. Small group environments to reduce the number of children in a group, for example, setting up two or three areas for colouring or doing crafts is suggested. Individual activities or activities that encourage more space between children and staff are encouraged. Toys that encourage group play in close proximity or increase the likelihood of physical contact should be put away. Toys that encourage individual play should be kept.

Early childhood educators can help younger children learn about physical distancing and less physical contact by creating games that include basic principles, such as “two arm lengths apart”. Using books, individual games, video and online programs as a part of learning so children can sit independently and distanced from each other is another strategy. The distance between nap mats should be increased, if possible. If space is tight, children may be placed head-to-toe or toe-to-toe. Centres should have a separate, supervised rest area available for children who have symptoms of illness until they can be picked up and ensure these areas are cleaned and disinfected after the child has left.

More information on health and safety standards for child care, plus the latest COVID-19 related child care information is available at: www.gov.bc.ca/ChildCareCovid-19Response

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