



Communicable Disease Plan COVID 19

Information for Students, Families and Staff

AUGUST 2021

Victoria Christian Education Society



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Introduction

On August 24, 2021, the Ministry of Education introduced the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for the K-12 Settings](#). Based on guidance from the BC Centre for Disease Control, K-12 students can participate in full-time, in-class instruction in accordance with current public health guidelines for schools. These new guidelines outline a return to school that all schools in British Columbia are expected to implement.

Key Principles

All schools in British Columbia are required to have communicable disease prevention plans in place which focus on reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

Some of the key controls for communicable disease prevention continue to be:

- hand hygiene
- staff and students staying home when sick
- daily health checks
- increased cleaning and disinfection
- use of non-medical masks

Experience in British Columbia and elsewhere continues to show that schools are low-risk sites for COVID-19 transmission when protective measures are in place.

Regional Differences

PCS will comply with all orders (provincial, regional, and local) issued by a Medical Health Officer. These orders or guidelines may augment the Provincial COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings based on epidemiological data. Regional or local orders would consider:

- increased community transmissions
- communities with low vaccination uptake
- local epidemiology

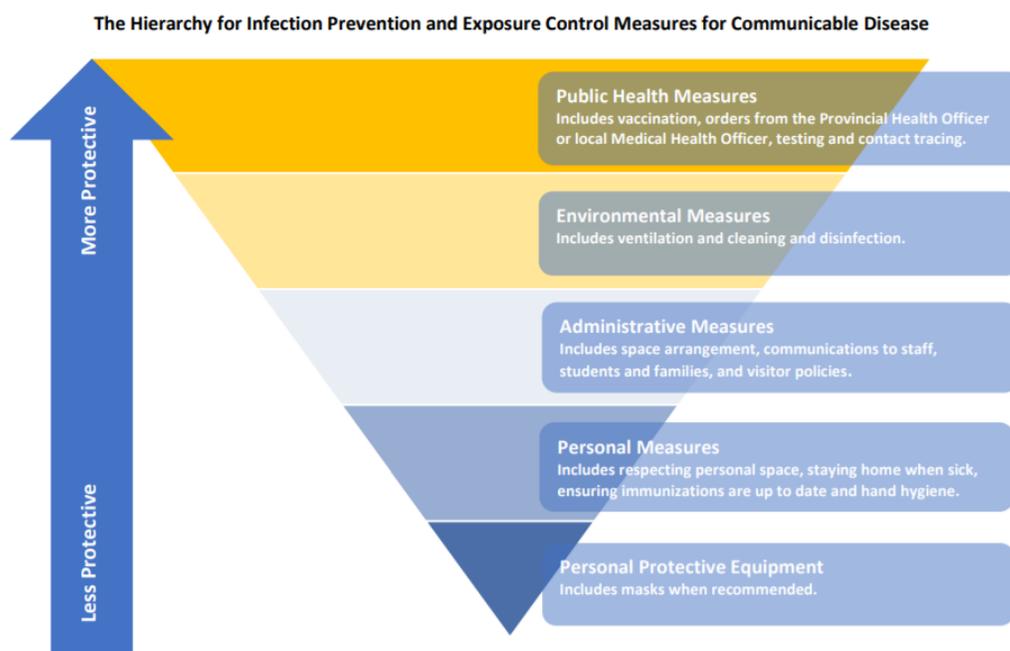
These orders may be issued as part of a local or regional strategy but may also be issued to an individual school within Island Health during times of elevated risk. These measures may include:

- limits on gatherings and events
- reconfiguring room arrangements or incorporating more activities that maximize space between people and reduce face-to-face contact
- limiting visitors
- recommending increased mask use

Infection Prevention and Control Measures

Infection prevention and exposure control measures (also called communicable disease measures or health and safety measures) help create safe environments by reducing the spread of communicable diseases like COVID-19. Schools provide a controlled environment in which access to the public is restricted. As such, these environments allow for greater use of administrative measures as all individuals present are part of the school environment.

The Hierarchy for Infection Prevention and Exposure Control Measures for Communicable Disease describes measures that should be taken to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in schools. Control measures at the top are more effective and protective than those at the bottom. By implementing a combination of measures at each level, the risk of COVID-19 is substantially reduced.



Supportive School Environments

Schools can support students to practice personal preventive measures by:

- having staff model these behaviors
- promoting safety measures in the school using visual aids like signage and posters

PCS will share links to reliable COVID-19 information on the school website to provide information to families. Additional information that PCS receives from our Regional Medical Health Officers or Island Health may be distributed to families and caregivers by PCS.

School staff will utilize positive and inclusive approaches to engage students in preventive practices and should not employ measures that are punitive or stigmatizing in nature.

Staff should also utilize a trauma-informed lens when planning school activities (e.g., gatherings and events) and interacting with other staff and students, including considerations around respecting the personal space of others.

Students and staff may choose to wear additional personal protective equipment in school beyond those outlined, and those choices will be respected.

Vaccines

Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in schools and communities. The vaccines used in BC remain highly effective against COVID-19, including variants of concern (such as the Delta Variant). Vaccinated people aged 12 and older tend to have milder illness if they get infected and are also less likely to spread COVID-19 than unvaccinated people.

Public Health strongly encourages all eligible students and staff to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 to protect themselves and those around them, including those who are not eligible to be vaccinated. People over 12 who are not vaccinated are at higher risk of getting and spreading COVID-19, with age the greatest factor of individual risk of severe illness. Most COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are now among unvaccinated adults.

According to the BC Centre for Disease Control, children under 12 who are not currently eligible to be vaccinated continue to be less likely to get and spread COVID-19 and have a low risk of serious outcomes if they do get COVID-19.

PCS will work with Island Health to share evidence-based information (e.g., from BCCDC and **ImmunizeBC**), and details on how and where people can get vaccinated, with staff, students, and families.

While COVID-19 is present in our communities, there will continue to be COVID-19 exposures in schools involving students and staff. However, the BC Centre for Disease Control reports that, with the increasing proportion of people 12 and over being fully vaccinated and effective communicable disease measures continuing to be in place, exposures are unlikely to lead to further transmission. At this time, vaccination is not required for K-12 staff or students; however, vaccinations are required for volunteers who have direct contact with students (except for those unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons).

Physical Distancing and Space Arrangement

Public Health no longer recommends learning groups or physical distancing of 2 metres as communicable disease measures for the K-12 setting. PCS will continue to:

- remind students and staff about respecting the personal space of others using visual supports, signage, and prompts as necessary
- use available space to spread people out, both in learning environments and for gatherings and events, where possible.
- implement strategies that prevent crowding at pick-up and drop-off times, including staggered starts and the use of multiple entrances to the building where possible
- focus on entry and exit areas and other places where people may gather or crowd
- take students outside more often, where and when possible
- manage the flow of people in common areas, including hallways and around lockers, to minimize crowding and allow for ease of people passing through
- use floor markings and posters to address traffic flow throughout the school

Staff Only Spaces

Transmission between adults within the school environment is also an important transmission route to control in the school environment.

Within staff meeting rooms and offices, additional precautions will be put in place including:

- rules and procedures to prevent crowding at gathering areas (such as the break room or photocopier)
- occupancy limits
- virtual options for meetings, when reasonable

School Gatherings and Events

School gatherings and events can occur in line with those permitted by all applicable Public Health orders and recommendations. Organizers will apply a trauma-informed lens to their planning, including consideration of:

- respecting student and staff comfort levels regarding personal space
- using space available to spread people out as much as possible, respecting room occupancy limits, and ensuring enough space is available to prevent involuntarily physical contact between attendees (e.g., overcrowding)
- gradual transitions to larger gatherings (e.g., school-wide assemblies), including starting with virtual or smaller in-person options, shorter in-person sessions, etc.

Personal Items

Staff and students can continue to bring personal items to school but they are encouraged to not share items that come in contact with the mouth (e.g., food, drinks, unwashed utensils, wind instruments).

PCS will seek to reduce crowding around lockers by:

- directional arrows in hallways.
- allowing their use for storage but not as social spaces

Supporting Students with Disabilities/Diverse Abilities

Most students with disabilities/diverse abilities or medical complexity are not considered at greater risk of experiencing severe illness from COVID-19. Refer to the [K-12 Recovery Plan](#) for students who have immune suppression.

PCS is committed to accommodating our students with disabilities/diverse abilities and will work with families to ensure that students have access to learning supports.

Families of students with disabilities/diverse abilities are encouraged to contact their school Principal to discuss available options for their child (including ensuring appropriate preventative measures are in place).

Guidelines for staff working with students with disabilities/diverse abilities where physical contact may be required

Supporting students with disabilities/diverse abilities may require staff providing support services in close physical proximity or in physical contact with a student. When staff are working with a student indoors, and the service cannot be provided from behind a barrier, staff are required to wear a non-medical mask, a face covering, or a face shield (in which case, a non-medical mask should be worn in addition to the face shield). Additional personal protective equipment is not required beyond that used as part of the personal care routine normally encountered in their regular course of work (e.g., gloves for toileting).

When working with students where seeing facial expressions and/or lip movement is important, and the service cannot be provided from behind a barrier, options include having the staff member wear a mask with a transparent section to enable visualization of the mouth.

Student Transportation

Buses

All bus drivers are required to wear non-medical masks except when driving. Bus drivers have received instruction on PCS cleaning and disinfecting procedures. All touch points will be disinfected after scheduled bus runs. In addition, hand sanitizer will be available for use upon entry to the bus.

All students riding the bus will be assigned a seat. Students will spread out within the bus when empty spaces are available. Whenever weather permits, windows will be open to allow for increased ventilation of the bus.

Families must assess their child daily for symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease before sending them to school. If a child has any symptoms, they must not take the bus or go to school.

Students in grades 4 to 12 are required to wear non-medical masks or face coverings when they are on the bus. Students in kindergarten to grade 3 are encouraged to wear a non-medical mask or face covering on school buses but are not required to do so.

Students should clean their hands before they leave home to take the bus, when they leave school prior to taking the bus, and when they get home. Students should put on their masks prior to boarding the bus.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Frequency

PCS will continue to perform daily general cleaning of all sites. Frequently touched surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected at least once in a 24-hour period. These frequently touched surfaces include:

- items used by large numbers of students and staff, including doorknobs, light switches, hand railings, water fountains, faucet handles, and toilet handles
- shared equipment (e.g., computer keyboards and tablets, glassware and testing equipment for science labs, kitchen equipment for culinary programs, sewing machines and sewing equipment for home economic programs, PE/sports equipment, music equipment, shared desks)
- appliances (staff and students can share the use of appliances and other objects, but need to treat items like microwaves, refrigerators, coffee pots, photocopiers, or laminators as frequently touched surfaces)
- service counters (e.g., office service window, library circulation desk)

Areas that are not used in a day will not require cleaning.

Cleaning of Teaching Materials, Fabrics, and Other Materials

Teaching materials, toys, or manipulatives that may not be able to be cleaned often (e.g., fabrics) or at all (e.g., sand, foam, playdough) may be used if hand hygiene is practiced before and after use. Carpets and rugs (e.g., in primary classes) can also be used.

No cleaning or additional hand washing is required when handling:

- textbooks, papers, or other paper-based products
- laminated or glossy paper-based products (e.g., children’s books or magazines)
- items with plastic covers

Cleaning and disinfecting bodily fluids will be conducted in accordance with normal procedures.

Staff or students doing laundry should ensure hand washing is practiced after loading a laundry machine. Dirty items should not be shaken and plastic liners should be used in the laundry basket, when collecting items to be washed.

Visitor/Volunteer Access

Under normal circumstances, PCS welcomes visitors. The COVID-19 pandemic is a difficult time for all of us. Safety is our number one priority. To minimize risk, visitors should seek permission from the person to be visited prior to the visit.

In general, the use of volunteers in the classroom and on field trips will be discouraged. Vaccinations are required for volunteers who have direct contact with students (except for those unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons).

If a visitor is unable to wear a mask due to a medical concern, preference will be given for virtual meetings wherever feasible.

When entering our buildings, visitors must complete a sign in sheet that indicates requirements for communicable disease protocol and completion of a daily health check prior to continuing into the school. PCS will keep these records for at least 45 days.

Community Use

After hours community use of facilities is permitted in alignment with other health and safety measures. Groups must have a communicable disease plan in place that ensures:

- diligent hand hygiene
- respiratory etiquette
- ensuring participants stay home if they are feeling ill
- where possible, limiting building access to only those areas required for the purpose of the activity

Community users are responsible for collecting names and contact information of participants to support contact tracing activities by Island Health.

Illness & Self-Assessment Policies and Protocols

Daily Health Checks

Families should assess their children daily for illness before sending them to school. Families can utilize the provincial [K-12 Health Check app](#) for daily assessment of symptoms.

Staff and other adults should review the posted list of symptoms and perform an active daily health check prior to entering the school. If there are any doubts, please use the [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#).

If a student, staff, or other adult is required to self-isolate, they must stay home and should not come to school. If, as a PCS staff member, you are required by Island Health to self-isolate, please contact your supervisor by phone immediately.

School Staff Responsibilities

- Ensure staff and other adults (e.g., parents, caregivers, visitors) entering the school are aware of their responsibility to complete a daily health check prior to entering the school (e.g., emails/letters to parents and staff, signage on doors) and to stay home if they are sick.
- Clearly communicate with families their responsibility to complete a daily health check with their child and keep them home from school if they are sick.

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- Establish procedures for students and staff who become sick while at school/work to be sent home as soon as possible.
 - Some students or staff may not be able to be picked up immediately. As such, schools should have a space available where the student or staff member can wait comfortably, is separated from others, and be provided with a non-medical mask if they do not have one (unless they are experiencing gastrointestinal symptoms and are at risk of vomiting).
 - Staff responsible for facility cleaning should clean and disinfect the surfaces/equipment with which the student/staff were in contact while they were ill (e.g., classroom desk, bathroom stall) prior to the surfaces/equipment being used by others.
 - Schools and districts should not require a healthcare provider note (e.g., a status of any individual, beyond those required to support medical accommodation as per usual practices).

Symptoms of Illness and Return to School

Students, staff, or other adults should stay at home when sick, as this is one of the most important ways to reduce the introduction to and the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

Students and staff who experience symptoms consistent with a previously diagnosed health condition (e.g., seasonal allergies) can continue to attend school as normal, when they are experiencing these symptoms. If they experience any new or unexplained symptoms, they should seek assessment by a healthcare provider.

Students or staff may still attend school, if a member of their household develops new symptoms of illness, provided the student or staff member has no symptoms themselves. If the household member tests positive for COVID-19, Public Health will advise the asymptomatic student or staff member on self-isolation and when they may return to school.

A healthcare provider note (i.e. a doctor's note) is not required to confirm the health status of any individual.

Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

Rigorous handwashing with plain soap and water is the most effective way to reduce the spread of illness (antibacterial soap is not needed for COVID-19). PCS encourages students to make use of handwashing facilities and will promote the importance of this activity with signage and posters.

To be effective, hands should be washed for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. Staff and students should make frequent use of handwashing facilities where available. Hand sanitizer should only be used in areas where handwashing is not readily available. Hand sanitizer should not be used when hands are visibly dirty.

When to Perform Hand Hygiene

| When Students Should Perform Hand Hygiene: | When Staff Should Perform Hand Hygiene: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• when they arrive at school and before they go home• before and after any breaks (e.g., recess, lunch)• between different learning environments (e.g., outdoor-indoor transitions, from the gym to the classroom)• before and after eating and drinking• after using the bathroom• after handling common resources, equipment, supplies, or pets• after sneezing or coughing into hands• whenever hands are visibly dirty | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• when they arrive at school and before they go home• before and after any breaks (e.g., recess, lunch)• between different learning environments (e.g., outdoor-indoor transitions, from the gym to the classroom)• before and after eating and drinking• before and after handling food or assisting students with eating• before and after giving medication to a student or self• after using the bathroom• after contact with body fluids (i.e., runny noses, spit, vomit, blood)• after cleaning tasks• after removing gloves• after handling garbage• whenever hands are visibly dirty |

Respiratory Etiquette

Control of coughs and sneezes is also an important tool in preventing the spread of COVID-19. Staff and students should cough or sneeze into their elbow, sleeve, or tissue and direct coughs and sneezes away from individuals wherever possible. Following a sneeze or cough, any tissue should be thrown away and hands should be washed.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Personal protective equipment (including masks) can provide an additional layer of protection. Non-medical masks and face coverings (hereafter referred to collectively as “masks”) have a role to play in preventing the spread of COVID-19. They provide some protection to the wearer and to those around them. Medical grade masks are not required within school settings for general use. Face shields should not be worn in place of non-medical masks.

In the event of a Public Health Order that requires stricter non-medical mask use than is indicated in the Ministry of Education guidelines, PCS will follow the Public Health Order.

Masks should not be used in the place of other safety protocols and individuals should still respect the personal space of others. Masks do not replace the need to conduct personal health checks, perform cleaning/disinfection activities, or for individuals to wash their hands.

Staff should utilize positive and inclusive approaches to engage students in the use of masks and should not employ measures that are punitive or stigmatizing in nature. Posters will be put up to direct students and staff on how to wear masks.

K-12 Staff: all K-12 staff are required to wear a mask indoors and on school buses.

Grades 4-12 Students: all students in grades 4 to 12 are required to wear a mask indoors and on school buses.

K-3 Students: students in kindergarten to grade 3 are encouraged to wear a mask indoors and on school buses but are not required to do so. Mask-wearing remains a personal or family choice for these students and their choices must be respected.

Visitors: all visitors are required to wear a mask indoors.

Exemptions for Staff, Students, and Visitors

Mask requirements do not apply in the following circumstances:

- to a person who cannot tolerate wearing a mask for health or behavioral reasons
- to a person who is unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person
- if the mask is removed temporarily for the purposes of identifying the person wearing it
- if the mask is removed temporarily to engage in an educational activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask (e.g., playing a wind instrument, engaging in high intensity physical activity)
- if a person is eating or drinking
- if a person is behind a barrier such as an office cubicle
- while providing a service to a person with a disability/diverse ability (including but not limited to a hearing impairment) where visual cues, facial expressions, and/or lip reading/movements is important

If a staff, student, or visitor is unable to wear a mask, other controls should remain in place.

General Ventilation and Air Circulation

At this time, there is no evidence that a building's ventilation system, in good operating condition, would contribute to the spread of the virus. Good indoor air ventilation alone cannot protect people from exposure to COVID-19; however, it may reduce risk when used in addition to other preventive measures.

PCS's heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are operating in compliance with Part 4 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation. These HVAC systems are maintained in accordance with best industry practice. PCS is working to identify areas where systems can be upgraded to increase air purification.

When weather permits, windows should be kept open.

Emergency and Evacuation Drills

It is critical that emergency and evacuation drills continue even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools will continue to conduct fire drills and other emergency drills. School Administrators will ensure that muster points for emergency drills are also spaced to ensure that classes make use of the space available to them to muster.

Communication and Training/Orientation

PCS is committed to assisting Island Health Regional Medical Health Officers and the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) in communicating guidance, recommendations, and orders. PCS will also continue to communicate to staff and families about changes to COVID-19 protocols using various means (including emails, letters, the school website, staff meetings, and orientations).

All staff will need to view the updated COVID-19 orientation prior to the return of students in September 2021. School Administrators should ensure all staff know how to report health and safety concerns and understand the protocols in place to keep them safe.

The PCS Joint Health and Safety Committee will need to discuss COVID-19 procedures monthly and ensure that procedures remain effective at their sites.

Curriculum, Programs, and Activities

All curriculum, programs, and activities will operate in alignment with [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#) and this document, including school-led activities held off campus (e.g., sports, community-based programs/courses).

PCS will continue to implement ongoing communicable disease prevention practices (e.g., cleaning and disinfecting, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette) specific to the activity.

In general, these practices should include:

- cleaning/disinfecting equipment
- hand hygiene practices specific to the activity
- reducing the number of close face-to-face interactions

For more information on course specific guidelines, please see the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#).