

April 1, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Important: This letter replaces the information contained in my letter dated March 30.

The Ministry of Education, Provincial Health Office, and BC Centre for Disease Control have now provided school districts with amendments to the K-12 health and safety guidelines. This information was released after the distribution of my [March 30 letter](#) and the newly released amendments contain some changes in wording to what was shared with you previously.

Please find below a summary of these amendments. The detailed amendments can be found in the following two documents:

- [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#)
- [BCCDC Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)

These amendments have been introduced as an extra layer of protection in response to recent increases in COVID-19 cases, variants of concern, transmission rates and more severe cases in B.C., in particular, in the Lower Mainland and in our health region, Fraser Health.

Summary of Amendments to the K-12 Health and Safety Guidelines

Effective immediately all K-12 staff and all students in Grades 4 to 12 are required to wear a mask or a face shield (in which case a non-medical mask should be worn in addition to the face shield) indoors in schools and on school buses – both within and outside of their learning group.

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

All visitors must wear a non-medical mask when they are inside the school.

Exceptions for Staff, Students and Visitors

The guidance outlined above regarding mask requirements does not apply to staff, students and visitors in the following circumstances:

- To a person who cannot tolerate wearing a mask for health or behavioural 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, etc.);
- If a person is eating or drinking;
- If a person is behind a barrier; or
- While providing a service to a person with a disability or diverse ability (including but not limited to a hearing impairment) where visual cues, facial expressions and/or lip reading/movements is important.

Mask use will be encouraged through positive and inclusive approaches, and no student should be prevented from attending or fully participating at school if they do not wear a mask. Students will be able to remove their masks while outside, including at recess, lunchtime and while learning outside. As the weather improves, teachers will continue to look for opportunities to move their classes outside.

As mentioned previously, all of our schools have reviewed their health and safety plans and are using the government's [School Health and Safety Checklist Tool](#) to ensure consistent implementation of the recommended measures.

In addition, we ask for your support in the following ways:

- Please send your child to school with a clean mask that they are used to wearing, and a spare mask. Schools will have disposable masks available if students forget their masks.
- Please share this Health Canada [video](#) and [poster](#) with your child(ren).
- Please remind your child(ren) that they should not remove their masks to eat or drink while walking through common areas of the school. Masks should only be removed for the purposes of eating and drinking where a person is relatively stationary (e.g. sitting or standing still).
- As per the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#) please ensure that you maintain physical distance and avoid crowding while on school grounds, including outside. As the weather starts to improve over the coming weeks and months, we know there will be greater temptation for people to stop and socialize during these times. However, we encourage you to leave the school grounds promptly and to avoid interacting with others outside your household, including letting your children play with others from outside their cohort in the playground.
- Out of school, please ensure your child avoids gathering with anyone indoors from outside of your household and limit outdoor gatherings to the same group of 10.
- Keep your child at home if they don't feel well. Complete the [daily health check](#) every day.
- Remind your child to maintain at least two metres physical distance from others when outside of their cohort, and to wash/sanitize their hands frequently.

These are simple measures, but together they provide valuable layers of protection and help to make a huge difference in preventing the spread of COVID-19. The single most important thing we can do to keep our schools safe is to help keep the number of cases in our communities low.

I encourage you to contact your school principal if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Doug Sheppard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail.

Doug Sheppard
Superintendent of Schools