RESTORING SAFE SCHOOLS

Planning Guide for 2021/2022 School Year

October 2021



Overview—Planning for the 2021/2022 School Year

After months of facing the global impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic together, Manitoba is on the road to reopening. Manitoba's vaccination rates continue to climb.

This collective effort and progress meant that Manitoba schools successfully reopened on September 7, 2021, with all students returning to in-class learning.

This document summarizes the fall 2021 reopening plan for schools, which includes:

- Ensuring a safe and healthy environment for all students and staff
- Having all students in class full-time
- Continuing to implement public health fundamentals (self-screening, hand hygiene and staying home when sick)
- Monitoring and implementing additional public health measures and contingency planning, as needed, to address changes in local community or school epidemiology
- Shifting towards addressing the impacts the pandemic has had on the mental health, well-being and learning of students and the school community

Four priority areas will guide planning:

- 1. Following health and safety measures as per public health guidance
- 2. Promoting mental health and well-being
- 3. Assessing and addressing learning impacts
- 4. Vaccinating Manitobans through outreach and promotion

For the 2021/2022 school year, \$58 million has been allocated to support the priority areas of health and safety, mental health and well-being, and assessing and addressing the learning impacts in our schools. This includes a \$5 million fund that has already been provided upfront to school divisions over the summer to support summer programming and assessment and learning activities for the start of the year.

Manitoba Education and education stakeholders worked closely throughout the 2021/2022 school year to develop and implement the provincial COVID-19 response for the Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system. This partnership was of critical importance to the success of the response. In 2021/2022, education stakeholders will continue to be integral to response planning. Planning will focus on mental health, well-being, and learning within a context of safe and healthy schools.



Reflecting on the Last School Year

Over the past two school years, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption. After a period of school closures in the spring of 2020, schools reopened for the 2020/2021 year at Caution (Yellow) level on the provincial Pandemic Response System. All Kindergarten to Grade 8 students were learning in-class full-time. Students with special learning needs and students at risk were prioritized for in-class learning. Many students in Grades 9 to 12 followed a schedule that blended in-class learning with learning remotely.

Throughout fall, cases of COVID-19 began to rise in the community. Public health officials advised a targeted implementation of tighter restrictions in select schools. This approach included full-time remote learning for all students in Grades 7 to 12 for two weeks following the December school holidays.

April and May saw a third wave of COVID-19 cases across the province. Again, public health officials advised a targeted approach of tighter restrictions in regions with higher transmission levels. At its peak, 47 per cent of schools were in full time remote learning to support the public health efforts to slow the spread. Students in full time remote learning went from four per cent in April to 34 per cent in May. In June, cases in the community and in schools began to decline, reflecting public health recommendations and orders as well as the increasing rates of vaccinations across the province.

The 4-3-2-One Great Summer Reopening Path, announced in June 2021, offered a phased in approach with fewer public health restrictions depending on achieving vaccination targets and keeping cases of COVID-19 under control. The reopening plan set key milestones and envisioned that, by Labour Day, all services, facilities, and businesses would reopen with limited restrictions in some cases. Because of the high percentage of Manitobans who have chosen vaccination, along with the ongoing efforts to follow public health advice and practice the fundamentals, these milestones were achieved ahead of time.



Priority 1: Health and Safety

Success: Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools are open for full-time in-class learning for all students, with contingency plans in place.

Schools began the school year at the Caution (Yellow) level of the Pandemic Response System. Regional differences in the Pandemic Response System levels may be present as specific areas see increased transmission.



CAUTION

The spread of COVID-19 is at low to moderate levels.

Household and close contact transmission is occurring in Manitoba.

There may be multiple and isolated small cluster outbreaks (or a small number of larger outbreaks) which are mostly contained.

Community transmission is low and/or localized/geographically limited.

Public health measures have been adapted to reflect the changing public health situation.

While current case numbers and vaccination rates are encouraging, there is a need to plan with public health officials regarding increased cases or a resurgence of COVID-19, as well as a resurgence of other respiratory viruses that may resemble COVID-19 symptoms. Schools need to plan for and be ready to implement additional measures if required.

Public Health Measures

- Staff and students will continue to follow the fundamentals (self-screening, hand hygiene and staying home when sick).
- Cohorts will be used for Kindergarten to Grade 6 to reduce the potential exposure in students not yet eligible for vaccination. There is the potential to move away from cohorts as the year progresses.
- Masks are required for all Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, staff, and visitors while indoors and while riding on a school bus, even where two metres (six feet) of distancing can be maintained. Mask breaks can occur when an individual is actively eating or drinking and for a brief time where there is physical distancing of two metres (six feet). Masks can be removed when outside.
- Schools should encourage physical distancing to the greatest extent possible. Schools will manage the flow of people in common areas, including hallways and washrooms, to minimize crowding and allow for the ease of people passing through. Schools will continue the practice of staggered entrance and exit times, or use separate entrances (if feasible).
- Cleaning and disinfecting will focus on high-touch surfaces and common areas but frequency can return to normal practices. Washrooms are the exception as they require more intensive cleaning. These facilities should also be used in a staggered manner.
- Schools will continue to implement non touch water drinking practices.
- Sharing toys, manipulatives and shared play stations is permitted, provided good hand hygiene is practiced before and after use.



- Schools will continue the practice of hand hygiene stations at the entrance and exit of school facilities and classrooms.
- School transportation will return to pre-COVID policies and practices with some additional cleaning requirements. Assigned seating will continue. Mask use is mandatory.
- Extra-curricular activities, field trips and overnights are permitted in accordance with public health guidance and orders. This is subject to change to follow public health recommendations and orders at the time.
- Wind instruments and indoor singing are allowed, while ensuring adequate ventilation
 and encouraging physical distancing where possible. Instruments, including accessories
 (e.g. drum sticks, mallets), may be shared provided hand washing and cleaning of accessories
 occurs before and after each use. If sharing, instruments and accessories will be cleaned and
 disinfected between users.
- Type and size of gatherings and assemblies will align with public health recommendations and orders for indoor gatherings at the time. Smaller grade specific or cohorted assemblies are recommended.
- Visitors and community use of schools will be permitted for activities allowed by public health recommendations and orders.
- School and classroom libraries are open for use. Ensure good hand hygiene before and after use.
- Schools will focus on maintaining ventilation and continue to ensure all mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are working properly, while opening windows when weather permits. Provincial guidance on ventilation will be followed.
- The use of outdoor space for in-class learning is encouraged, weather permitting.

Details of public health measures can be found in Appendix 1.

Contingency Planning

The degree to which schools can remain open for in-class learning depends on several factors, such as vaccinations, variants of COVID-19 and the capacity of our health care system. We are committed to working with our public health and education partners to keep schools open for in-class learning.

Schools will plan to implement additional public health measures as outlined in the Caution (Yellow), Restricted (Orange) and Critical (Red) levels of the Pandemic Response System (Appendix 2). As the level of risk changes, public health officials may identify regions or schools of concern. Schools will work with public health officials and Manitoba Education to implement the appropriate additional public health measures and contingency plans. Depending on the situation at the time, public health guidance may require modification to some provisions. School-wide shifts to remote learning will be a measure of last resort.

For symptomatic students who are required to stay home, smooth learning transitions will be needed. Classroom teachers will ensure these students stay connected to on-going learning by providing at-home learning packages and/or remote learning until they are able to return to the classroom.

The provincial Manitoba Education Standards for Remote Learning guidelines will be followed by schools in temporary remote learning to ensure students continue to learn and be assessed by their teachers. The guidelines can be found at: www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/remote_learn_standards.pdf

Public Health Case and Contact Management

Case and contact management of confirmed cases of COVID-19 is an important and effective public health strategy for reducing transmission. With declining cases of COVID-19 and increased vaccinations, it is anticipated that case and contact management will evolve over time as we transition back to normal processes. COVID-19 case and contact management processes that are currently in place will remain until public health officials advise otherwise.

Schools will continue with good documentation practices to record student attendance in class and at extra-curricular activities. All students and staff will continue practicing good hand hygiene and staying home when sick. Schools will plan for students to learn from home when they are sick or symptomatic and required to stay home. See *Toolkit for Notification of Cases in Schools* for further information.

Testing

Public access testing sites across the province, along with the dedicated Fast Pass sites, will remain open to ensure geographical access, appointment options, and quick turn around time to results.

The Provincial Testing Task Force continues to review testing capacity needs. A strategic approach to testing is being developed that meets provincial capacity needs and maintains effective turnaround times for Manitobans. This includes careful planning for a possible resurgence of other respiratory viruses that may mirror COVID-19 symptoms, such as influenza.

On September 25, 2021, public health officials issued orders requiring all designated provincial public service employees who have ongoing or prolonged contact with vulnerable populations, including children, to undergo frequent COVID-19 testing if they do not provide proof of full vaccination (www.gov.mb.ca./covid19/prs/orders/index.html). To that end, any school staff not fully immunized by October 18, 2021, must undergo mandatory testing up to three times a week.

COVID-19 Dashboard: School-Aged and School Staff Cases in Manitoba

The Kindergarten to Grade 12 Schools Data Dashboard was frequently used by families and education stakeholders for current and cumulative information on cases associated with schools. A case associated with a school that appeared on the dashboard did not mean that the individual was present at the school when infectious or that acquisition or transmission occurred at the school.

Dashboard updates were paused for July and August, because of summer holidays. Manitoba Education resumed working with public health officials to update the dashboard in September 2021. Changes may occur over time as public health officials shift case and contact management approaches.

The COVID-19 Dashboard: School-Aged Cases and School Staff Cases in Manitoba for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Schools can be found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html.



Priority 2: Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being

Success: Mental health supports are responsive to the needs of students and school staff.

COVID-19 has impacted the mental health and wellness of many Manitoba students, educators and school staff. In-class learning, peer contact and school celebrations have been disrupted for a generation of students. Isolation and loneliness, as well as disruptions to routines and a sense of loss, have contributed to increased anxiety and depression. This impact has been heightened for those who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Teachers and staff have been responsive to the changing public health situation and the needs of their students and families, while also grappling with the impacts of the pandemic personally, alongside all Manitobans. This has taken a toll on all involved in the education system and the impacts are expected to be felt for years to come.

In the 2020/2021 school year, the province supported a number of initiatives that support student mental health and well-being with \$2.5 million invested over and above the per pupil funding provided to school divisions. Additional investments included the following:

- Project 11 A classroom and virtual program developed by the True North Youth Foundation was expanded to additional grades.
- Provincial pilot of Enhanced School-Based Mental Health and Addictions Supports This pilot integrates and enhances access to mental health and addiction supports for students in Grades 6 to 12.
- Kids Help Phone The province invested in virtual programming for Kids Help Phone.
- The Remote Learning Support centre also offered services and supports to students and families through their team of service providers and their resources available at www.mbremotelearning.ca.
- Investments were made in Families and Schools Together to build resilient families with young, school-aged children.
- Investments were made in mental health supports for the Community Schools Program.
- Manitoba also invested in an expansion of Thrival Kits, developed by the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth.

Manitoba Education, the Manitoba School Boards Association, SAFE Work Manitoba, public health officials and other stakeholders also developed the Manitoba Pandemic Support Guides, a series of health and safety resources to support school staff. These guides included:

- Promoting Physical Safety www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/mpsg_promote.pdf
- Taking Care of Yourself www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/mpsg_taking_care.pdf
- Caring for Our Students www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/mpsg_caring_student.pdf
- Resources for Students and Adults www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/mpsg_resources.pdf



Mental health and well-being tip sheets that were developed as part of this strategy are available as follows:

- Tips for students www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/tips_students.pdf
- Tips for Parents and Caregivers www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/tips_parents.pdf
- Tips for Teachers www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/tips_teachers.pdf
- Resources for Youth and Adults www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/tips_resources.pdf

While schools have remained safe, it is recognized that some students and school staff may have feelings of anxiety about COVID-19 and being in school. In 2021/2022, the province is developing a continuum of mental health and well being supports for Kindergarten to Grade 12 schools. These supports will strategically expand existing programming and add new programming to provide a range of supports to respond to the differential mental health impacts of the pandemic on students and teachers. Through per pupil funding and targeted investments, school divisions and independent schools are asked to prioritize mental health and well-being, and develop a plan in response to their local needs. This continuum of supports is important for responding to the needs of individual students and communities.

Partnerships with community organizations and stakeholders like The Manitoba Teachers Society, the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth will also continue.

Priority 3: Assessing and Addressing Learning Impacts

Success: Students have access to and engage in high-quality learning and plans are in place to address learning impacts.

The continuity of education is central to our fall planning. The impacts of COVID-19 on student learning will be felt in the 2021/2022 school year and beyond. These impacts have affected students and staff in different ways and a varied, strategic approach to address them is required. Funding is available to schools and school divisions to support learning priorities over the summer and into the next school year.

School divisions and schools will incorporate the following principles into their approach to addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on student learning:

- addressing the mental well-being of students and staff once in class learning has resumed, as a foundation for learning
- using assessments to further understand the impacts of COVID-19 for learners, examining themes across classes and school communities and using the results to inform planning
- understanding individual students' unique strengths and needs
- building plans that acknowledge the diversity of student and educator experiences during the pandemic



- collaborating with students, parents and caregivers, other classroom teachers and student services personnel
- meeting students where they are in their learning process as they transition from periods of remote learning back to in-class learning
- developing plans to address the holistic needs of students, especially students identified as having been most at risk during the pandemic
- providing access to rich learning experiences in all subject areas

Provincial Assessments

The province is committed to developing a new student assessment framework that includes strengthening classroom assessments in all grades and creating new summative assessments in the early years, middle years and Grade 10. In the 2021/2022 school year, the Grade 3 Assessment in Reading, Lecture and Numeracy and the Grade 4 Assessment in French Immersion Lecture, and the Middle Years Assessment of Key Competencies in Mathematics, Reading Comprehension and Expository Writing will continue. The assessments will be important for understanding the impact of COVID-19 on student learning.

The pandemic resulted in the cancellation of the Grade 12 provincial exams during the last two school years. The 2021/2022 school year is an opportunity to move forward with developing a Grade 10 assessment as recommended by the Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education. Therefore, the Grade 12 provincial tests will not proceed in 2021/2022 and the province will work towards the development of an assessment in Grade 10.

Remote Learning

Shifts to remote learning will be directed by public health officials based on a risk assessment. In addition to the remote learning offered by school divisions in 2020/2021, the province launched the Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre in January 2021 to provide direct remote learning supports to Kindergarten to Grade 8 students and teachers.

For 2021/2022, students who are immunocompromised (or those with household members who are) continue to require remote learning. The province has committed \$5 million to the Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre to provide remote learning for these students. For students in Grades 9 to 12, InformNet, Teacher Mediated Option (TMO) and Learning from Home School (LFHS)/L'École Apprendre-chez-soi will continue to provide remote learning options. InformNet has capacity to support up to 3200 students. TMO has capacity to support up to 800 students. LFHS, a French Immersion online high school, has capacity to support up to 525 students.

In addition, because the 2021/2022 school year continues to require staff and students to stay home when they are sick, schools and school divisions will plan for absenteeism. Classroom teachers will ensure smooth transitions to temporary remote learning by supporting the development and provision of at-home learning packages and/or remote learning for students who are isolating.



Priority 4: Vaccination Outreach and Promotion

Success: High vaccine uptake occurs among students and staff.

It is important that youth in Manitoba are protected against COVID-19. The best way to achieve this is for youth to receive both doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they are eligible.

The campaign to vaccinate Manitobans aged 12 to 17 has been underway since May and vaccination rates continue to climb. Health Canada approval for vaccinating younger children (ages 5 to 11) is expected in the very near future. Public health officials are planning to implement vaccinations for this age group once the vaccines have been approved. Vaccine promotion activities for Manitoba youth are ramping up to support a safe return to schools. The Vaccine Implementation Task Force has brought forward plans for school based COVID-19 immunization campaigns for youth aged 12 to 17 and children 5 to 11 years of age (once approved) to begin in the fall. Schools located in communities with lower vaccine uptake will be prioritized to boost vaccination rates to help prevent outbreaks. Offering vaccinations in schools is safe and effective, and helps address accessibility barriers for many families. Families wishing to have their youth and children vaccinated outside of the school setting will continue to have access to other options, including pharmacies, primary care physicians and pop-up clinics in the community.

Appendix 1:Public health measures for schools

		Measures
Instructional Program	Kindergarten to Grade 12	 All students are learning in class. Full curriculum is being taught. Modifications to delivery may be required as a result of current public health measures.
	Students with Special Learning Needs and Students at Risk	• Students with special learning needs and students at risk may continue to require additional supports, as well as frequent collaboration and planning, strong communication, flexibility and creativity within the student support team. Students continue to receive appropriate supports, as per the student-specific planning process and where required by their individual health care plans.
		 School teams continue to work in collaboration with families and related agencies and organizations that support children, youth and their families. Planning takes into account particular timelines, responsibilities of each partner and key practices across environments, to ensure appropriate educational programming is in place for in-class or remote learning.
	Students who Are Immunocompromised	 Manitoba Remote Learning Support Centre provides remote learning for students in Kindergarten to Grade 8 who are immunocompromised. InformNet, Teacher Mediated Options and Learning from Home School/L'École Apprendre-chez-soi are available for students in Grades 9 to 12 who are immunocompromised.

	Measures	
Physical Distancing and Cohorts	 Schools use cohorts for Kindergarten to Grade 6 to assist with case management and to minimize exposure for students who are not yet eligible for vaccinations. There is the potential to move away from cohorts as the year progresses, depending on public health recommendations at the time. Schools should encourage physical distancing to the greatest extent possible. Schools manage the flow of people in common areas, including hallways, and washrooms to minimize crowding and allow for the ease of people passing through. They implement the practice of staggered entrance and exit times, or use separate entrances (if feasible). 	
Masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	 Non-medical masks are mandatory in all indoor spaces, including schools, for all Kindergarten to Grade 12 students. This requirement includes masks in the classroom and while riding the bus even when two metres (six feet) of distancing can be maintained. Mask breaks can occur when an individual is actively eating or drinking and for a brief time where there is physical distancing of two metres (six feet). Masks can be removed when outside. Masks may be removed when participating in physical activity. Public health officials will continue to monitor closely and will adjust guidance as needed. The province will ensure masks and personal protective equipment are available to schools for use. Manitoba Education will work with public health officials to determine the level of personal protective equipment required for staff supporting students who require interventions or supports that must be delivered in close proximity. Existing guidance to be followed. A layered approach to safety in schools is being implemented where two metres (six feet) distancing between individuals is required. For further information on mask use, refer to www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/. 	
Transportation	 School transportation returns to pre-COVID policies and practices with some additional cleaning requirements. Buses will be at full capacity. Assigned seating will be retained. Mask use is mandatory. 	
Extra- curricular, sports and field trips	 Extra-curricular activities, including sports, optional programming and field trips, will follow public health recommendations and orders at the time. Overnight trips are permitted. This is subject to change. Any change will follow public health recommendations and orders at the time. 	

	Measures		
Assemblies and gatherings	Types and size of gatherings and assemblies align with public health recommendations and orders for indoor gatherings at the time. Smaller grade-specific or cohorted assemblies are recommended.		
Visitors, Community Use of Schools	Visitors, volunteers and community use of schools are permitted, provided they adhere to public health recommendations and orders at the time.		
	 School divisions and schools ensure that any required public health recommendations and orders are followed by the users of the facilities. 		
	Schools ensure proper documentation of visitors is implemented to support case and contact management.		
Public Health Fundamentals	• Students and staff continue to follow hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Guidance is found at www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/fundamentals/focus-on-the-fundamentals.html.		
	Schools ensure the on-going practice of hand hygiene stations at entrances and exits to school facilities and classrooms and encourage frequent usage.		
	• It is important that parents and guardians screen their child(ren) for COVID-19 symptoms before sending them to school each day. A self-screening tool is available at https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/.		
	 Schools can require students or staff who are showing symptoms to stay home, encourage them to seek testing and follow public health recommendations and orders on testing. Current public health information on isolation requirements and exemptions is found at https://manitoba.ca/covid19/ fundamentals/self-isolation.html. 		

	Measures
	Since the risk of COVID-19 transmission from surfaces is low, a transition to pre-COVID cleaning practices will occur.
	Cleaning and disinfecting focuses on high-touch surfaces and common areas but frequency can return to normal practices. Washrooms are the exception, as they require more intensive cleaning.
	Schools are prepared to enhance cleaning and disinfection measures and protocols when required.
Oleanton and	• Schools
Cleaning and Disinfecting	o Monitor hand hygiene supplies to ensure an ample supply at all sinks in washroom and kitchen areas.
	o Continue to implement touchless water drinking practice, including the use of water bottles and touchless water fountains where available.
	o Return bus cleaning to pre-COVID practices.
	o Perform good hand hygiene after waste removal. No-touch waste receptacles are preferred.
	 Health Canada has posted a list of disinfectants shown to be effective against COVID-19 at www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html.
	Only school staff handle, prepare and serve food, following all safe food handling protocols.
	Utensils should be used.
Food	Remove shared food containers from eating areas. If using single serve packets of condiments, provide them directly to students. Use prepackaged snacks and serve them directly to students.
	Open kitchen and cafeteria areas to eat, but avoid overcrowding.
Handling	Ensure proper hand hygiene practices.
	The use of microwaves is acceptable provided proper hand hygiene is followed before and after use. Microwaves must be cleaned in accordance with regular scheduled cleaning for high-touch surfaces.
	Food and nutrition courses involving food preparation with students may continue if supervised by qualified staff who follow industry standards.
Sharing toys, and manipulatives and using the library	Students can share toys and manipulatives . Ensure hand hygiene before and after use.
	 Shared play stations (e.g., water tables and sand tables) are permitted, provided good hand hygiene before and after use is practiced.
	School and classroom libraries are open for use. Ensure good hand hygiene before and after use

	Measures		
Ventilation	 Schools apply guidance, including the following: move activities outdoors when possible (for example, lunch, classes and physical activity) and consider moving classrooms outside when space and weather permit. ensure that the ventilation system operates properly. increase air exchanges by adjusting the HVAC system. open windows when possible and if weather permits. maximize space and avoid crowded rooms and hallways. 		
Music (Wind instruments and singing indoors)	 Wind instruments and indoor singing are allowed. Ensure adequate ventilation and strive for two metres (six feet) of physical distancing where possible and consider outdoor classrooms as weather permits. Sharing of music stands and sheet music is permitted, provided good hand hygiene practices are followed. Instruments should not be shared, except for equity of access purposes. If sharing, instruments and accessories will be cleaned and disinfected between users. When individuals wash their hands before and after using the item, and the item is thoroughly cleaned after use, music accessories (e.g., drums sticks, mallets) may be shared. 		
Child Care Centres	Schools work cooperatively with school-based child care centres to ensure that they can continue to operate. This includes protection of designated child care centre space for child care centres in schools, and an approach to supporting shared spaces, including cleaning protocols.		
Technology Education	 Technology education programming is permitted, provided public health measures are followed. When planning for technical-vocational, industrial arts, human ecology and applied commerce education programs, the following Manitoba COVID-19 support documents may provide useful sector-specific information: Workplace Guidance for Business Owners and Guidance for Industry Sectors. These documents are available at https://manitoba.ca/asset_library/en/coronavirus/restoring-workplace-guidance.pdf. 		