

COVID-19 Guidelines for Schools and School-Located Child Care Centres

When developing procedures and strategies to meet common public health guidelines for the upcoming year, school divisions and schools should work together with co-located licensed child care centres (including; centres, nursery schools and before and after school programs) to develop coordinated plans. This will help to ensure the ability to meet requirements and support all children whose regular routines (ex: scheduled use of shared spaces such as the gym, kitchen or playground, drop off/pick up times, etc.) are affected.

Open lines of communication and coordination between schools and child care facilities will be essential to ensure the safety, health and well-being of all children, families and staff.

Key Considerations for Schools and Child Care Centres

The following key considerations should be part of the divisional, school and early learning and child care plans.

Dedicated Space of ELCC Programs

- Existing early learning and child care programs located in schools or on school property cannot be displaced from their dedicated space to manage physical distancing requirements.
- This is important to the re-opening of Manitoba's economy. Manitoba parents/guardians continue to require their child care space to work, study or find employment.
- Should school divisions require the use of a child care facility's dedicated space to accommodate physical distancing when there are no other possible solutions, relocating the child care program within the school could be considered.
- Schools and child care facilities will need to cooperate to ensure a re-location will not hinder the child care program's ability to continue its operations. The alternate location would need to meet space and licensing requirements that ensure child care facilities can operate at their regular licensed capacity. Relocation would require relicensing of the temporary space.

Shared Space

- Shared spaces are areas of the school that may be used by the child care program but are not dedicated to the child care facility. These can include multi-purpose rooms, such as a music room or gymnasium, where there are scheduled times for room use between the school and child care facility. There are also common-use spaces such as washrooms, kitchens, play ground/outdoor spaces, etc.

- For both shared and common-use spaces, school divisions and child care facilities should coordinate plans and be flexible to find solutions to any issues that arise in continuing to share these spaces.
- Scheduling the use of spaces to meet physical distancing measures and other public health requirements should consider the needs of both early learning and child care programs and schools.
- Schools and child care programs may need to change their existing schedule/programming to ensure the use of the shared spaces meets public health guidance. If possible, designating space for specific groups could be considered to keep groups of children separated.
- Movement within the school should be limited throughout the day to the greatest extent possible.
- Maintain separate containers for toys and equipment and designate space within the play area for each cohort. Outdoor play areas and toys should be cleaned and disinfected between use as per regular cleaning and disinfection procedures.
- For shared-use spaces, child care facilities and schools should share cleaning and sanitization duties after using the space and before the next group arrives.
- Common rooms such as washrooms, staff rooms and kitchens should also be sanitized and cleaned frequently by schools and child care facilities, allowing for the sharing of related costs.

Roll-Away Child Care Programs

- Roll-away child care programs, such as before and after school programs, rely on shared school space and should not be displaced.
- School divisions and schools should also work with rollaway child care programs to ensure seamless transitions for children if staggered arrivals/departures or other scheduling considerations are being developed.
- Shared cleaning and sanitation practices should be implemented as discussed above.

Capacity and Cohorts

- In September, as per current public health direction, child care centres may operate at full capacity if they are able to meet public health requirements, subject to public health orders:
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/protection/soe.html>.
- Both child care centres and schools will determine their own cohorts (i.e. maximum groups of children), which will be distinct.
- For child care centres, each cohort should be no more than 30 children, subject to public health orders. Smaller group sizes are preferable.
- For schools, the maximum cohort size will be no more than 75 students. There is no limit on the number of cohorts, as long as they can be separated to prevent contact with other groups.
- Whenever possible, assign children and staff to a group and keep them together throughout the day.

- Children who are school-aged and also attend a before and after school program will belong to two distinct cohorts: one as part of child care programming and another as part of the school.
- As per public health requirements, where physical distancing cannot be maintained between individual children, it is important to maintain at least one metre between children seated within a cohort and at least four meters between groups or cohorts of children (i.e. two groups of children can be in the same room provided the groups do not intermingle and four metres of space is maintained).

Staggered Arrivals/Departures

- As part of planning and scheduling staggered arrivals/departures for students, consideration should also be given to allow for a separate time slot when children attending the child care facility can arrive/depart. This separation will help limit interactions, avoid crowding and minimize contact between different groups of children.
- To manage arrivals and departures and minimize traffic in the school building, where appropriate, child care centres may need to consider planning for drop off and pick up outside the facility or using separate entrances, if feasible.
- Child care facilities may need to be flexible and change their programming hours to accommodate different drop off/pick up times, if necessary, to implement a staggered approach.

Transportation to Schools

- Wherever possible, in the short-term, parents are encouraged to transport their own children from child care to their school (if child care is located at a different school).
- As part of any adjustments to bussing plans, school/school divisions should give consideration to school-aged children that continue to require transportation from a child care facility to their school. These children may need to be considered as part of the coordinated planning for distinct “bus transportation cohorts” to and from the school.