



COVID-19 RESPONSE PLAN 2021-2022

Fort McMurray Public School Division

Doing What's Best for Kids!

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Please Note: The Fort McMurray Public School Division will be updating this document regularly for its students, staff and families.

Originally compiled on August 24, 2021

-February 28, 2022

**Purple text & asterisk indicates new information*

Background

Summary

According to the Government of Alberta, the [2021-2022 School Year Plan](#) is based on the transition to the recovery phase reflecting a corresponding shift from mandatory health measures to recommend health best practices.

The summary of measures were released on August 13, 2021, as described in the following:

With current availability and uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine, Alberta is shifting from an emergency response for the COVID-19 pandemic to the public health management we use for other viruses, such as influenza, including in schools. Shifting resources used to respond to COVID-19 in Alberta will allow us to respond to other illnesses as we approach fall and winter.

Students in Alberta will return to school for fall 2021, with in-person learning for the majority of students. In order to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, schools will incorporate recommendations that support good public health practises into their normal operations for the 2021-2022 school year.

This includes supporting all staff and eligible students who choose to get vaccinated for COVID-19 and influenza, implementing environmental measures such as maintaining ventilation systems and routine cleaning standards, promoting hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and staying home when sick. Schools will not be expected to follow all the previous measures used during the 2020-2021 school year.

Source: Government of Alberta; 2021-2022 School Year Plan.



Guidance for Respiratory Illness Prevention and Management in Schools

Overview

Routine public health practices can minimise transmission of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, influenza and common colds. These practices include: proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, maintaining ventilation, staying home when sick and getting vaccinated.

The guidance provided in this document is based on the [Alberta Government 2021-2022 School Year Plan](#) and intended to support schools and school authority leaders in reducing the risk of transmission of these illnesses and infections among students, staff and visitors by providing options to integrate good public health practises into normal operations under the 2021-22 School Year Plan.

Schools and school authorities were strongly encouraged to use strategies from the Plan to establish its own plans to reduce transmission of COVID-19, influenza as well as other infections in the school setting. Individuals should also assess and manage their personal risk, which may include using additional precautions such as continuing to use a face mask, in order to serve their individual needs. School authorities continue to have the ability and corresponding accountability for any local measures that are put in place, such as physical distancing, cohorting and masking requirements that may exceed provincial guidance.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) Zone Medical Officers of Health (MOHs) and their designates are available to support school authorities throughout the province. Their role is to provide guidance on communicable disease risk as well as risk management.

If you have concerns, need specific guidance, or have questions about how to apply the measures in this document, or additional measures based on local context, please contact Alberta Health Services' Environmental Public Health in our North Zone for assistance by email at northzone.environmentalhealth@ahs.ca.

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Five Core Preventative Measures

The official [2021-2022 School Year Plan](#) outlines 'Five Core Public Health Preventative Measures' the Fort McMurray Public Schools will follow for the upcoming year, including; Vaccines, Environmental Measures, Staying Home When Sick, Hand Hygiene, and Respiratory Etiquette.

Fort McMurray Public School Division Preventative Measures:

1. Vaccines

- a. The Fort McMurray Public School Division has participated in a long-standing partnership between Alberta Education and Alberta Health Services to provide access to public health prevention measures. This has included immunization programs, and in the past dental and vision screening.
- b. The Public Health Immunization program has previously offered vaccination including Measles, Mumps, Rubella, HPV, and Chickenpox. AHS is now indicating that the vaccination program will also make the *Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA COVID* vaccination available for eligible students and staff.
- c. Please note, this is a voluntary program.
- d. Parent/Guardian letters and consent forms will be sent home the first day of school by school messenger. *All forms are to be collected within one week.*
- e. Local public health services will coordinate immunization clinics at each eligible school with the Principal.



COVID-19 School Immunization Program Letter & Consent Form Downloads:

[Alberta Health Services COVID-19 School Immunization Program Letter](#)

[Alberta Health Services COVID-19 School Immunization Consent Form](#)

2. Staying Home When Sick

- a. Before leaving home, staff and students should self-screen for symptoms each day that they enter the school using the Alberta Daily Health Checklist.
- b. Parents/guardians, students and staff should be provided a copy of the appropriate daily health checklist. .



- c.
- d. Office locations will have screening checklists and hand sanitation stations.
- e. Anyone that reports symptoms must be directed to stay home and fill out the [AHS online self-assessment tool](#).

Click [here](#) to download the **UPDATED Alberta Daily Health Checklist**.

3. Hand Hygiene

- a. Hand washing posters should be posted in washrooms and above sinks to encourage proper hand washing practice.
- b. We have purchased and have adequate hand sanitizer to maintain all schools up to and including December 2021. Over the fall, we will monitor our usage and make determinations for January to June as we monitor cases in the Wood Buffalo region.



Click [here](#) to download **Alberta Health Services Hand Washing Posters online**.

4. Respiratory Etiquette*

- a. As of February 14, 2022 there will be no masking requirements for children and youth in schools or on school buses in Alberta. This applies to ECDP to Grade 12.
- b. Children and youth can continue to wear masks if they choose to. Schools should support children and youth who choose to wear masks.



5. Environmental Measures

- a. Our Operations & Maintenance (O&M) program continues to implement required HVAC programs in accordance with manufacturer operational guidelines.
- b. We are continuing with building closure at 8:30 p.m., and Sundays to all for enhanced cleaning and sterilization of rooms. Door stickers to indicate a sterilized room will remain in use.

- c. Air X -15 cleaning solution and cloths will be available for classrooms and common areas. It is highly recommended that high touch areas and equipment are cleaned frequently.
- d. Plexiglass dividers will remain in place.
- e. Soft surfaces (i.e: class carpets, chairs, cushions) are not banned, however, careful development of clearing and disinfecting of high touch surfaces should be developed.
- f. Lockers, food services, water fountains are permitted as per Alberta Health Services guidelines.



Guidance for School Transportation

Children and students across the province travel to and from school through a combination of walking, being driven by their parents /guardians, public transportation and school bus services provided by school authorities.

School authorities determine transportation service levels, ensuring all children and students legally entitled to transportation are transported in accordance with school authority policy. School authorities should continue to

adjust routing in response to ridership demand. School authorities should discuss transportation plans early in cases of Education Services Agreements with First Nations.

Travel/transportation of children and students must follow public health measures should they be in place. Alberta Education will collaborate, should the need arise, with Alberta Transportation and Alberta Health to ensure challenges raised by school authorities are considered.



[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

Public Health Management of Respiratory Illness in Schools

What activities no longer have restrictions or specific guidance?

- Many routine school activities and services no longer have any restrictions or specific guidance. Schools may continue with these activities as they normally would. These include activities and services such as, but not limited to:
 - Field trips
 - Performance activities
 - Physical activities
 - Provincial Achievement Tests
 - Student transportation
 - Work experience
 - Ceremonies and celebratory events International student programs

Why are schools returning to in-person learning for the majority of students for 2021-2022?

- Studies have shown that some responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the closure of schools to in-person learning and cancellation of extra-curricular events, led to a deterioration in children and youth mental health. It is important to consider the negative impacts of measures when looking at a population that has shown to be at lower risk of severe outcomes. Any additional restrictions for children and youth should be proportionate to their overall risk level.
- All staff and students born in 2009 or earlier are eligible for COVID-19 vaccine. The higher the immunization rate is in a school, the more protection from COVID-19 infections there will be for everyone. *More information about the COVID-18 vaccine program can be found [here](#).*
- Children under 12 years of age have much lower rates of hospitalization, severe disease and death from COVID-19. Based on Alberta's experience in the 2020-2021 school year, schools were not the primary drivers of COVID-19 transmission during that time period.
- We may not be able to entirely eliminate COVID-19, but we can develop a sustainable approach that does not have disproportionate impacts on learning and development opportunities for our children while also preventing serious outcomes, hospitalizations and death due to the disease.

UPDATED

Is physical distancing or maintaining spacing required?

- Effective March 1, 2022 the province has removed Kindergarten to Grade 6 chorting
- Schools may consider strategies to reduce crowding between all students/staff in areas inside and outside of the classroom, including hallways, washrooms and common areas. This could include:
 - Staggering start and end times for classes to avoid crowded entrances or exits and hallways.
 - Removing and restaging seating in public areas to reduce crowding.
 - Consider spacing of desks to minimize risk of disease transmission.
 - Consider removing additional items or pieces of equipment that are not in use from classrooms to allow more space to spread out.
 - Considering utilizing virtual options instead of holding large inperson gatherings of students and staff

Are students still participating in physical activities in school?

- Yes, students are able to participate in physical activities in school.

Are students still participating in sport/performance/recreation (extracurricular sports, performance, recreation, and special interests)?

- Indoor activities are permitted, with requirements for two-metre physical distancing possible. There are no restrictions on outdoor activities.

Are there any masking requirements or recommendations?

- As of February 14, 2022 there will be no masking requirements for children and youth in schools or on school buses in Alberta. This applies to ECDP to Grade 12.
- Effective March 1, 2022 the province has removed masking requirements. Masks will remain optional for Staff and students. Schools should support children and youth who choose to wear masks.
- Fully vaccinated students or staff recovering from COVID-19 who are completing their day 6-10 mandatory masking period at school must wear a mask at all times and must not share breaks where masks must be removed to consume food or beverages with non-COVID-19 infected individuals. If more than one individual is isolating, it is possible to cohort people with COVID-19 for breaks and lunch.
- Students who become ill while at school should be provided with a medical mask that can be worn while waiting to go home.

What if there is a case of COVID-19 in a school?

The rapid rise of cases has required changes to case investigation protocols, where resources are being focused on the highest risk settings and individuals. Alberta Health Services is no longer notifying our Division of COVID-19 cases.

Are schools visiting Vista Ridge this Winter Season for skiing and tubing?

- Yes, schools will be able to participate in activities at Vista Ridge.
- School groups of no more than 50 students or approximately 2 classes.
- Class cohorts will have separate seating areas in the main lodge and will go through the rental shop at different times.
- Rental shop capacity will be reduced to minimize congestion.
- Instructors will be staggering group lunches to ensure a limited number of students occupy the lodge and cafeteria at one time.

Will Diploma Exams take place?

- A decision will be made later in 2022 regarding April and June diploma exams

Are we welcoming spectators into schools?

- Junior/Senior High Schools will have spectators in masks as of Feb. 14, 2022 with capacity limits of 500.

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When will Community rental agreements and Joint Use agreements take place?

- We will continue Community rental agreements and Joint Use agreements on March 1, 2022 as per each school principal.

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Parents/Guardians, Volunteers, and visitors

- All visitors and volunteers, including parents and guardians, are encouraged to make appointments and must use the [Daily Health Checklist](#) prior to visiting the school

Vaccinations

The most important step we can take to ensure the health and safety of our community is to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Fort McMurray Public School Division will be requiring all staff to declare their vaccination status to Human Resources by December 17, 2021 as Fully Vaccinated, Partially Vaccinated or Not Vaccinated. Staff will be required to be fully vaccinated by January 17, 2022 or will be required to provide a negative test result every 72 hrs to verify that they are COVID-19 negative. This is consistent with [Administrative Procedure 449 Hazard Mitigation](#).

While Health Canada has approved the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5 to 11, the decision to vaccinate remains a parental choice. Alberta Education does not require proof of vaccination to attend school in person.

Due to privacy laws, we cannot ask or disclose if students are vaccinated. Below are links to additional information about the COVID-19 vaccine to help you make an informed decision for your family.

- www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/page17746.aspx
- www.alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine.aspx
- www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/vaccination-children.html
- www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/immunization/covid-19-vaccine-for-children

When to isolate or quarantine

COVID-19 can take up to 14 days to [cause symptoms](#). Some people who get it only have minor symptoms or don't have any symptoms at all but could still be infectious. By staying home, it lowers the chance of spreading the virus to others.

Isolation helps prevent the spread of COVID-19 by reducing the number of people you could infect if you [have symptoms or test positive](#) by staying home and avoiding others. **Quarantine** limits potential spread from people who have been exposed to COVID-19 but have not yet developed symptoms or tested positive.

When to Isolate: **UPDATED**

- You tested positive for COVID-19, or
- You are sick with a [core symptom](#): fever, cough, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, sore throat* or runny nose

*Children under 18 with just one of either a runny nose or sore throat are not legally required to be isolated but should stay home until well.

The mandatory isolation period for people with core symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition is:

Fully vaccinated: 5 days or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer, plus 5 days of wearing a mask at all times when around others outside of home.

- **Not fully vaccinated: 10 calendar days from the collection date of the swab or from the date when the rapid take home test was completed.**
- **Individuals can conduct a second test not less than 24 hours after the initial test, and if negative, and still no symptoms, they do not need to continue to isolate. If the result is positive on the repeat test, they should continue to isolate. If at any time, symptoms develop, they must follow isolation instructions for symptomatic individuals**

When to quarantine

- Close contacts of positive cases are not required to quarantine, but should:
 - [Monitor for symptoms](#) and avoid visiting high risk settings.
 - [Get tested](#) if symptoms develop.
 - International travellers must comply with [federal travel requirements](#).

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References & Resources

The following references have been cited throughout the document to provide further information on the Alberta Government's 2021-2022 School Year Plan. The Fort McMurray Public School Division will update this document regularly for its students, staff and faculty.

[March 2022 Guidance for Schools \(K-12\)](#)

[Alberta Health Services, Public Health Services, School Immunization Program](#)

[January 3, 2022 Information for Close Contacts](#)

[August 13, 2021 Alberta Education Letter to Parents](#)