

COVID-19

GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

**Supporting Health
and Safety for All**



March 2022

Principles Used to Develop the Guide:

- That the plan addresses all aspects of the Board's operations and prioritizes physical safety along with the mental health, well-being, and emotional safety of students and staff.
- That Human Rights Code-related needs and equitable approaches and outcomes will be considered in all aspects of school operations, decision making and implementation, to ensure responsiveness to and respectfulness of individual identities, strengths, needs, experiences and circumstances.
- Accommodating staff and students' disability/medical and other Human Rights Code-related needs are entrenched in our work.
- That we are committed to fostering an inclusive environment that respects the diverse identities of our school communities and values their input.
- Ongoing communication and engagement with students, families, staff, union/federation partners, Trustees and community members are prioritized.
- That in order to meet the needs of rapidly changing contexts, the plan is easily adaptable and able to quickly address changing conditions.
- The plan was informed by recommendations in the reports from partner associations and the medical community about school reopening.
- The measures outlined in the plan have been carefully reviewed and supported by the Durham Region Health Department.
- Student learning for 2021-22 will be available in different forms to meet the needs of students within the context of a pandemic.

This version of the COVID-19 Guide for Schools reflects the updates from the March 9, 2022 announcement by the Government of Ontario.

Note: The links contained in this guide are meant for internal use to support the safe and effective operation of schools and may not be publicly accessible.

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Introduction

The priority of the Durham District School Board (DDSB) is always the safety, well-being and human rights of our students and staff. The aim of this COVID-19 guide for schools is to support health and safety for all who enter our facilities.

Thoughtful planning from a cross-section of DDSB staff and input from students and families has gone into developing this guidance. Many daily operations and methods of delivering education are similar to the 2020-21 school year, and most will require a continuous re-evaluation as the situation continues to unfold.

In addition, we will continue to consider Human Rights Code-related needs and equitable approaches and outcomes in all aspects of school planning, decision making and implementation to be responsive to and respectful of students' and employees' individual identities, needs, experiences and circumstances.

We are closely monitoring the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and are working collaboratively with the Durham Region Health Department to implement lessons learned through the 2020-21 school year, to better anticipate and respond to challenges, and to adjust as information changes.

All parties including staff, parents/guardians and students must work together and be vigilant about following the public health and safety protocols in this document to ensure that we continue to stay safe. This includes getting vaccinated if you are eligible as it will not only benefit you but those around you.

Everyone has a shared responsibility to keep each other safe and we will continue to encourage this through COVID-19 awareness materials in schools and online. We will also continue to focus on the mental health and well-being of all members of the DDSB community with a renewed emphasis on strategies to support students and staff. Thank you for your attention and commitment to this goal and we look forward to having a safe and successful school year.

Human Rights and Equity

The DDSB is committed to providing learning environments, services and workplaces that are welcoming, respectful, safe, inclusive, equitable, accessible and free from discrimination and harassment. We will prioritize Human Rights Code-related needs, and equitable approaches and outcomes, in all aspects of reopening planning, decision-making and implementation. This includes:

- Prioritizing, promoting and supporting human rights, equity and inclusion when applying all sections of this guide.
- Considering diverse student, employee and community voices and perspectives to inform planning, decision making and implementation.
- Using flexible approaches and providing supports and resources that are responsive to and respectful of individual identities, needs and circumstances.
- Accommodating new, existing or changing human rights related needs, to the point of undue hardship on the Board.
- Identifying, preventing and addressing human rights related barriers.
- Taking appropriate action to address discriminatory behaviour, including and not limited to discrimination against individuals or groups because of biases, assumptions or stereotypes

against anyone who has (or who is believed to have) tested positive for Covid-19, is self-isolating, awaiting test results, and/or is unable to wear a mask.

- Supporting inclusive, equitable and culturally relevant and responsive learning and providing differentiated approaches and supports to address students' needs.

Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing

Our primary consideration is the physical safety, mental health, well-being and human rights of all members of the DDSB community. Planning for a mentally healthy return to school includes consideration of circumstances which may have varied for students, families and staff. Students and staff will be approaching the transition from a range of vantage points, needs and experiences.

The foundation of a mentally healthy return to school is grounded in relationships. A focus on developing caring and attuned relationships is key to the success of students, families and staff. As we re-engage in learning this September, focusing on the foundations of mentally healthy classrooms and leveraging the power of connection provides an opportunity to support both the student and the educator relationships and well-being, while deepening our partnerships with families, and broadening our understanding of what leads to engaged learning, what contributes to academic success, and a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Educators will be provided with resources that support the implementation of everyday strategies that foster strong, positive and inclusive classroom practises, and will in turn lead to mentally healthy classrooms. [*The Foundations of a Mentally Health Classroom: The First 20 Days \(and Beyond\) of Creating Connection and Well-Being Guide*](#) will provide Educators with the opportunity to establish the conditions for a classroom culture of trusting, respectful and safe relationships, where purposeful moments of connection become the vital ingredients for enhancing a young person's mental health and creating the optimal conditions for learning and development. This guide has been revised for the start of the 2021-2022 school year. It is vitally important that the strategies within the guide are implemented centring the lived experience and identity of our students. The revisions to the guide include considerations for the impact of systemic racism and the impact to student's everyday social interactions in the creation of mentally healthy classrooms.

A helpful framework to consider when planning for a mentally healthy return to school is to "Think in Tiers". Using a tiered approach to achieve a mentally healthy return to school ensures that planning occurs for students, families and staff across a continuum of needs.

- **For ALL - Universal Supports** (Tier 1) - all students and staff will need a chance to debrief, to build relationships, to feel a sense of belonging, and to re-engage with school life. General school guidelines to support transitions back to school for all will be developed.
- **For SOME - Additional Supports** for those more impacted by COVID-19, racism, systemic discrimination and oppression and world events (Tier 2) - Some students, families and staff will need extra support to re-establish school relationships. These students and staff may need access to additional mental health supports via Inclusive Student Services (Psychological Services, Social Work) and EFAP, respectively.

- **For FEW - Specialized Supports** for those with significant needs and who have been the most vulnerable or affected by the COVID-19 crisis, racism, systemic discrimination and oppression and world events (Tier 3) – Services pathways will need to be available for those requiring more intensive mental health support during the transition back to school. For more information on the pathways available for students, consultation can occur with Social Work or Psychological Services Staff. For more information regarding the pathways available to staff, contact with HR and/or the EFAP provider will be required.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations are an important tool to help stop the spread of COVID-19, and in allowing students, staff and families to safely resume normal activities. Vaccinations for all eligible youth and adults will further reduce the risk to everyone within the school community. The DDSB will continue to work closely with our Public Health partners to support COVID-19 vaccination for those eligible.

Management of COVID-19 in Schools

Changes to provincial criteria for COVID testing and contact tracing mean that we will not always have information about possible COVID cases in schools and that classes/cohorts will no longer be dismissed by public health. Based on new public health guidance, contacts only exposed at school or childcare are **not** considered high risk contacts and are not required to isolate. Therefore, staff and/or students do not need to self-isolate and can continue to attend school if they do not have any symptoms.

Communicating with the School Community

Parents, students and staff will continue to be notified of self-reported confirmed cases within the school setting.

A [COVID-19 Advisory](#) section will continue to be posted on the DDSB website and will provide a status update on self-reported confirmed cases involving a staff member or student in a school setting. The COVID-19 advisory section will also include absenteeism due to illness data any notices of classroom, cohort or school closure.

Designated Isolation Area

Each school will continue to have a dedicated space that will serve as a location to manage individuals that may become ill while attending school or work. The isolation area will be equipped with a PPE Kit as well as instructions (schools will post these instructions with the PPE Kit, and in the dedicated isolation area). Arrangements will be made for pick up of the ill individual and the designated isolation area will be cleaned once pick up has occurred.

[PPE Kit and Isolation Room Instructions](#)

Student, Staff and Visitor Screening

All staff, students and visitors must continue to screen daily prior to coming to school/childcare/work on DDSB property. Parents/guardians/students/visitors will continue to use the [Ontario School Screening Tool](#) and follow the directions provided on the screening tool.

International Travel

The federal government has provided return to school requirements for unvaccinated students who are returning from international travel. School staff and students are required to follow these requirements upon returning from international travel.

International Travel - Return to School

Visitors and Volunteers

The previous limitation on visitors and volunteers within the school has been lifted. In-person meetings with school staff will be permitted. Spectators for sporting events are also permitted.

The SCC meetings will be conducted in a hybrid format (virtually and in-person).

Use of Non-Medical Masks for Students

The masking requirement for students while at school or on school buses has been lifted.

Although this requirement has been removed in schools, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health has indicated it is still encouraged to wear a mask in public settings. Schools will be a mask-friendly environment and students, visitors, families, and staff are welcome to continue to wear masks while at school and/or on the bus. **Masks will continue to be made available for students who choose to wear them.**

Currently, there are certain circumstances where the Ministry of Health requires masking while attending school ([Ministry of Health: COVID-19 Integrated Testing and Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance](#)).

For example:

- if returning to school after a 5-day isolation period (COVID positive result), masks are required to be worn for days 6-10.
- asymptomatic household contacts that pass the screening and can attend school or work are required to wear a mask for 10 days after last exposure to the COVID positive household member.

In addition, under current Federal travel requirements, masks must be worn in all public spaces (including schools) for 14 days upon return from international travel.

The Ontario School Screening Tool outlines these instructions when a mask is required to be worn.

[How to Wear a Mask Poster - Students](#)

[Wearing your Mask 101](#)

Staff Personal Protective Equipment Requirements

The requirement for staff to wear personal protective equipment (mask, eye protection) has been lifted. PPE will be provided to staff if they choose to continue to wear it and will remain available through an eBase work order.

Currently, there are certain circumstances where the Ministry of Health requires masking while attending school ([Ministry of Health: COVID-19 Integrated Testing and Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance](#)).

For example:

- if returning to school after a 5-day isolation period (COVID positive result), masks are required to be worn for days 6-10.
- asymptomatic household contacts that pass the screening and can attend school or work are required to wear a mask for 10 days after last exposure to the COVID positive household member.

In addition, under current Federal travel requirements, masks must be worn in all public spaces (including schools) for 14 days upon return from international travel.

The Ontario School Screening Tool outlines these instructions when a mask is required to be worn.

COVID Related - Masking requirements remain in place for Regulated Health Professionals (Psychological Services and Speech Language Pathologists) through to April 27th, 2022 when providing direct, regulated services.

Staff PPE specific to the needs of individual students will continue to be delineated in student safety plans.

Staff can refer to the [DDSB Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) Resource](#) for more information including the care and use of PPE.

Ventilation

Ventilation upgrades have been an ongoing priority at DDSB. Over the last five years, there have been 181 projects related to ventilation in schools across the District with an investment of more than \$30 million. Projects completed range from energy controls, partial ventilation upgrades in older sections of schools, ventilation duct work upgrades through to complete new systems. These projects take place based on need to help ensure that we continue to have high functioning and efficient ventilation systems.

Since the start of the pandemic, in order to support improved ventilation and air quality within schools, DDSB has implemented a number of measures to enhance air quality within all schools:

- There has been an increase in the minimum ventilation rate on all HVAC systems, including a full air exchange post and pre-occupied times.
- DDSB has invested in upgraded filters from MERV 7 to MERV 13 for all ventilation systems.
- Systems have been recalibrated to optimize air flow within each building.
- Ventilation checks have been completed on all systems.
- The DDSB initially purchased 1,870 portable HEPA air filtration units, which have been installed, and as funding became available, ordered and received an additional 150 in January 2022 and 180 in February 2022. These units will enhance ventilation and will be installed in various schools across the district. Furthermore, as of February 2022 we have received an additional 75 units supplied by the Ministry of Education on top of the 311 units they have provided already.
- Duct cleaning is being completed at schools to boost overall ventilation system efficiency.
- There is the continued recommissioning of all pneumatic controls and existing HVAC systems to maintain optimal performance.
- Building automation systems are monitored daily for any HVAC related issues.

The DDSB will continue to undertake ventilation enhancements and upgrades in order to ensure that ventilation continues to be at a high level in all schools. Our priority is to ensure a safe learning and working environment for all students, staff and visitors at our school – and we recognize that ventilation is an important part of that.

For school specific ventilation information, please refer to the [DDSB Ventilation Measures Report](#).

Hand Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette

- Hand hygiene supplies will be available in all classrooms and offices, and restocking will occur as required on a regular basis using the work order system.
- Hand sanitizer will be placed at the entrance to each school and in classrooms.
- Soap and paper towels will be provided in every classroom with a hand washing sink.
- If hand sanitizer is used on children, they must be supervised. Safe placement of the hand sanitizer to avoid consumption is important, especially with young children.
- A schedule to regularly clean hands will be incorporated into the daily routine.
- If hands are visibly soiled, soap and water must be used.
- Students will continue to be educated on proper cough and sneeze etiquette and to avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- School will post hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette signage throughout the school building.

[Hand Sanitizing Station Poster](#)

[How to Wash Hands Poster](#)

[How to Sanitize Hands Poster](#)

[Cover your Cough Poster](#)

Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection

- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols meet the current public health requirements and will continue. See the [DDSB Facilities Services Cleaning and Disinfection Protocols](#) for further details.
- High touch point areas will be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day throughout the building. Cleaning and disinfecting of counters, tables, desktops and touch points on chairs will take place routinely throughout the day using the board's approved disinfectant.
- Only Board approved cleaning product can be used. Staff are reminded of the importance of not bringing in their own cleaning materials.
- Custodial staff can provide Board approved cleaning materials to staff for classroom use if requested.

Soft surfaces that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected will remain out of the classroom (e.g., area rugs, plush/absorbent items)

Classroom Setup

- Classroom furniture/students' desks can be arranged to support group work activities.
- Soft surfaces that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected will remain out of the classroom (e.g., area rugs, plush/absorbent items).
- Every effort will be made to keep classrooms clutter free in order to facilitate enhanced cleaning.

- Educators should avoid bringing in materials from home, unless the learning is dependent upon those materials.

Main Offices

- Sign in sheets for occasional staff and the visitor log can be placed on a surface that is at a distance from the office staff.
- Hand sanitizer will be available in the main office.
- Secondary students will now report to the main office to obtain a late slip. The classroom teacher is not required to record the late entry.
- Elementary and secondary students needing to obtain a late slip will receive one through the use of a late slip printer that can be placed at a distance from the office staff.

Library Use

Libraries at elementary and secondary schools can be utilized at full capacity without physical distancing measures. Hand sanitizer will be available at the entrance/exit and on the circulation desk.

Shared Equipment and Materials

- Regular hand hygiene will need to be incorporated into the activity.
- Technology devices can be cleaned with 70% isopropyl alcohol or by using the Board approved disinfectant sprayed on a microfibre cloth and wiped. Do not spray directly on technology devices or saturate the devices, as that will potentially damage them.
- Staff in schools are permitted to handle/process cash with a focus on hand hygiene before and after, along with cleaning/disinfecting surfaces after completing the activity (i.e., wiping the desk/table with spray disinfectant and paper towels).

Assemblies

In-person assemblies are now permitted to take place but may also take place virtually at the discretion of school staff.

Lunch Breaks and Food Programs

- Secondary cafeterias will be open for use and students will be free to leave school during the lunch hour. Cafeterias can operate at full capacity.
- Elementary students remaining at school for the lunch hour will be supervised by lunchroom supervisors or school staff.
- Staff and students will be encouraged to perform proper hand hygiene before and after eating.
- Breakfast programs/nutrition programs/third party food events (e.g., SCC fundraisers) are permitted to operate.
- All food program volunteers must have a 'Food Handler Certification'.
- Water bottle refill stations will be available however drinking fountains will continue to be off limits. Students are encouraged to bring their own water bottle.

Staff Lunch Rooms, Staff Work Rooms, Mail Rooms and Staff Meetings

Capacity limits on staff rooms, work rooms and mail rooms have been lifted.

In-person staff meetings are now permitted to take place but may also take place virtually at the discretion of school staff.

Transportation

The DDSB continues to work with Durham Student Transportation Services (DSTS) and the Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB) to develop a unified transportation plan with an increased emphasis of staff and student safety. The following protocols will be required.

Seating and Capacity:

- Elementary capacity – Regular capacity, up to 3 per seat to Grade 6, and up to 2 per seat for Grade 7 and 8.
- Secondary capacity – Regular capacity, up to 2 per seat.

Health and Safety:

- Daily self-screening is required for all bus drivers before work.
- The requirement for bus drivers to wear personal protective equipment (mask, eye protection) has been lifted. PPE will be provided to drivers if they choose to continue to wear it. The use of non-medical masks for all students (K-12) riding the bus will be optional.
- Bus operators will clean their buses twice per day, focussing on the high touch point areas.

Emergency Management and Fire Procedures

Emergency Drills:

- Schools will continue to be required to meet the regulatory standard for frequency of conducting emergency drills including lockdown (minimum one per school year), hold and secure (minimum once per school year) and shelter in place/bomb threat evacuation (minimum once per school year).
- Schools should notify local emergency services in advance of scheduled drills.

Medical Emergency/First Aid Response:

Wear appropriate personal protective equipment when attending to a situation that requires first aid. Additional masks, gloves, disposable gown and eye protection should be placed with all first aid kits. At a minimum, gloves a mask and face shield will be worn when performing first aid. If there is a potential for exposure to blood or bodily fluid, a disposable gown will also be worn.

- Follow Public Health Guidelines around hand hygiene following any first aid interaction.
- Dispose of any waste in a safe fashion.

Academic Programs Guidance

The [Academic Programs Guide](#) provides subject related curriculum delivery and includes provincial best practices that have been established to mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19.

The DDSB will continue to work with provincial associations for additional guidance on the delivery of subject specific curriculum.

Special Education/Inclusive Student Services

The Inclusive Student Services team supports school teams in the provision of programs and services including consideration for the continuing aspects of COVID-19 that may impact the safety of staff and students.

Student Services in Schools, Clinical Supports, and Community Partnerships

Inclusive Student Services (ISS) team members greatly value the way in which their services are embedded within the overall support provided to students, staff and families. Health and Safety considerations when Inclusive Student Services staff are on site in schools:

- Clinical spaces will be set up according to guidelines set out by Health and Safety, along with Facilities Services. These spaces are designated for the prioritization of clinical purposes 1) ISS team members; and 2) School Based Rehabilitative Services. Team members will be responsible for the coordination of access. School level responsibility is to ensure that spaces are not repurposed.
- Clinicians will be following protocols, such as those developed for assessment materials, to support the health of students and team members.
- Services continues to occur through a variety of formats including in-person/on-site and virtual services. Connection and consultation of format remains important. For example, parent/guardian preference for a virtual meeting.
 - To ensure adherence to health protocols and clinical professional standards, many adaptations to our service model are being made to ensure safety for all with partners including, but not limited to: Grandview Children’s Centre, Community Partners in Nursing, our Grove (Education Community Partnership Program) agency partners and many others.
 - These protocols will be communicated directly to impacted schools and the families of children receiving these services.

Protocol: BMS

- As regular practice, planning at the school level, should have focus on tiers of response and staff responsibilities which have staff regularly assigned (e.g., permanent and LTO) to the school engaged in Behaviour Safety Plan program implementation/support to students presenting with risk of injurious behaviours, and supply staff assigned to other students.
- Guidance related to the Behaviour Management Safety (BMS) procedures has been reviewed provincially. The BMS Safety Procedures in which staff are trained must remain intact, as they are built upon essential principles that maintain student and staff safety. Health and Safety protocols must be used *adjunctively* to ensure appropriate precautions for mitigating the risk associated with COVID-19 exposure. In the event of physical contact and/or the use of containment, both the safety principles from BMS and the protocols from Health and Safety must work in tandem.

Extra-curricular Activities

All limitations on extra-curricular activities have been lifted. This includes school clubs, non-sport activities, intramural and inter-school sports.

Spectators for afterschool inter-school competitions are permitted.

Field Trips

Schools are encouraged to take a gradual approach to resuming field trips. As such, overnight field trips will be permitted, but students must remain within Canada. International travel will not be supported for the remainder of this school year.

Early Years: COVID-19 Guidance

The Kindergarten Program

The goal of this section is to support Kindergarten educators in creating and implementing a play-based Kindergarten program that continues to follow enhanced health and safety measures which include an increased focus on frequent hand hygiene, physical distancing where possible and the use of masks. Our goal is for Kindergarten programs to support the healthy development of all children by incorporating fundamental aspects of early years pedagogy and a return to programming that best supports the needs of all children while maintaining health and safety requirements.

Health and Safety

- The use of masks for kindergarten students while at school or on the bus is optional. Please refer to Use of Non-Medical Masks for Students section of this document additional information.
- Hand hygiene should take place frequently throughout the day, more so than just at typical times such as lunch, snacks and transitions.
- Use of shared materials (toys, art supplies, blocks, etc.) is permitted as long as regular hand hygiene is being practiced throughout the day.
- Sensory play is permitted as long as children are washing hands before/after use.
- Indoor sensory play such as sand and playdough must continue to be personal use only.
- Regular cleaning and disinfection of toys/sensory materials is required.
- Outdoor equipment is permitted to be shared between students; hand hygiene should be incorporated into the activity

Extended Day Kindergarten, Before and After School Programs and After School Recreation Programs

Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection

Enhanced cleaning and disinfection protocols meet the current public health requirements and will continue.

Child Care will transition children outdoors in the morning for a minimum of 15 minutes to allow rooms to be cleaned. In the afternoon, child care will take the children outside for 30 minutes of outdoor play time (as detailed in the CCEYA), this will provide custodial staff and child care with time to wipe down surfaces and high touch points.

Shared space classrooms are encouraged to keep a cleaning and disinfecting log to track and demonstrate cleaning schedules.

All classrooms will be cleaned and disinfected in the evening to prepare for the next day.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Staff and Masking for Children

PPE for childcare staff and masking for children is optional. Please refer to Use of Non-Medical Masks for Students section of this document additional information.

Screening

All individuals including children attending before and after school programs will continue to self-screen each day before entering the program. Children who have screened for prior to entering the before and after school program would not need to re-screen for the core day program. Similarly, an individual that has screened prior to the before school program or core day program, would not need to re-screen for the after-school program.

Pick Up and Drop Off Procedures

As the limitation on visitors to schools has been lifted, parents may enter the school building to pick up their child(ren).

Illness Protocols

Any student or staff member that is symptomatic or has been advised to self-isolate will not be able to attend the program. If a child becomes symptomatic during the child care before and after school program, they are to be isolated in a separate room (where possible) and their families contacted to arrange pick-up. Children must be supervised at all times. The use of the space is to be communicated with school administrators and custodial staff to ensure the space is properly cleaned and disinfected. Please refer to Public Health protocols for further information on best practices when someone demonstrates symptoms of illness.

Food Preparation and Provision

All partners should follow regular food preparation guidelines. Family style meals are permitted to operate provided that food handlers use adequate food handling and safety procedures. Nutrition/third party food programs are permitted to operate. Proper hand hygiene needs to be practiced when staff are preparing food for all individuals before and after eating.

Community Use of Schools

The DDSB is proceeding cautiously with allowing Community Use of Schools activities, currently permitting programs that directly support children and youth activities.

APPENDIX A: RESOURCES

[COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#)

[Durham Region Health Department School Re-Opening Tool-kit](#)

[Child and Youth COVID-19 Vaccination Fact Sheet – Ministry of Health](#)

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