

PARENTS' GUIDE 2021–22 SCHOOL YEAR

Information for parents and guardians

What to expect

Parents, students and school staff can participate in many classroom and school activities as they did before the pandemic, such as sports and extracurricular activities, with public health measures in place.

To keep students learning safely in-person, we are resuming public reporting of COVID-19 cases in schools, initiating contact notification in schools, monitoring COVID-19 outbreaks, providing rapid test kits and encouraging school authorities to have proof of COVID-19 vaccination policies for adults.

Current public health measures include:

- Mandatory masking for students in grades 4 and up plus staff and teachers in all grades.
- Masks are recommended for students attending kindergarten to Grade 3.
- Elementary schools are to implement class cohorting.
- Indoor sports, fitness, recreation, and performance activities are permitted in schools, with requirements to maintain 2-metre physical distancing where possible.
- Masks and distancing are not required by youth under 18 while engaged in physical activity.
- Spectator attendance restricted to 1/3 fire code capacity and limited to households or 2 close contacts for those living alone. Attendees must be masked and distanced.
- Students and staff should screen daily for symptoms using the [Alberta Health Daily Checklist](#).



- Isolate if you have core COVID-19 symptoms or test positive. All individuals who test positive for COVID-19 are required to isolate and remain at home for 10 days, regardless of their age.
- People who are not fully immunized and are household contacts of someone with COVID-19 should also stay home and monitor for symptoms for 14 days. A household contact is a person who lives in the same home as the person with COVID-19, such as parent or sibling. Household contacts also include people who have similar close interactions, such as caregivers or friends sleeping over.
- Follow best practices to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.

School authorities continue to have the ability and corresponding accountability to put in place additional local measures that may exceed provincial guidance.

For more details: alberta.ca/returntoschool

School activities

Should things change, there are plans for continuing learning with more health measures in place.



Good public health practices

Washing hands and following the school's rules are important ways to keep each other safe.

It is important to encourage good respiratory etiquette: sneezing into the elbow or a tissue, discarding tissues immediately into a lined bin, and washing hands before touching anything else.

Each day before you take your child to school, ask your child how they are feeling. You should use the [Alberta Health Daily Checklist](#) for children under 18.

If your child has new signs of illness or symptoms, the checklist will help you determine how long your child should stay home from school and whether you should use the [AHS Online Assessment Tool](#) or call Health Link 811 to arrange for testing.

Students with fever, cough, shortness of breath or loss of sense of smell or taste must stay home and isolate for 10 days. They can return to school before 10 days if they have a negative COVID-19 test result.

Vaccines work

It is important for Albertans to get vaccinated to protect themselves and others. Vaccines are safe, effective, and they save lives. Every fall, the [annual influenza vaccine](#) is available to everyone aged six months and older.

Everyone born in 2009 or earlier is eligible to get their first and second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. Two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been shown to be highly protective against infection. You can [book an appointment](#) today for yourself and your child, if they are eligible.

If you want more information on vaccines, please read [why the COVID-19 vaccine is safe](#) and familiarize yourself with [common myths and facts](#).

COVID-19 immunization clinics began in September 2021 for grades 7 through 12 schools across the province. Students under 18 will not be vaccinated in schools without parent or guardian consent. It is important that parents or guardians return completed consent forms for their children as quickly as possible. Consent forms will be available to download or can be requested from your child's school.

We strongly encourage all school authorities to develop policies that require proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test for teachers, staff and anyone who enters a school.

This does not include students. A school authority cannot deny students access to education due to immunization status.

If a K–6 class shifts to at-home learning, vaccinated children will typically also make this shift for operational reasons. (See *Shifting to at home learning* on page 4.)

Protecting children who are not yet eligible for the vaccine

Getting vaccinated is a highly effective way to reduce the risk to those who cannot get the vaccine yet, such as children born in 2010 or later (aged 11 and under).

Staying home when sick, washing hands and covering coughs and sneezes are also essential in reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.



For more details: alberta.ca/returntoschool

Cohorting

A cohort is a small group whose members—always the same people—do not always keep two metres apart. Elementary schools are to implement class cohorting.

Physical distancing

Schools are to implement physical distancing of 2 metres while indoors, wherever possible.

Masks

Masks are mandatory for students in grades 4 and up plus staff and teachers in all grades.

Masks are recommended for students attending kindergarten to Grade 3.

In addition, masks are required for all students and staff on school buses.

Learn more at alberta.ca/masks.



Routine public health measures for schools

Schools should have procedures for regular cleaning and disinfecting of high touch surfaces. This will help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, gastrointestinal illnesses, and other communicable diseases.

Other things schools can do include:

- Ensuring air circulation (HVAC) systems are working properly
- Opening windows and doors, and encouraging outdoor activities when weather permits
- Routine cleaning procedures, like regularly wiping down high touch areas and disinfecting

For more details: alberta.ca/returntoschool



If your child or a staff member gets sick at school

If a student or staff member develops symptoms of illness at school, the school should have a plan. Schools will contact parents if their children show symptoms of illness while at school. This may mean sending the student or staff member home, where possible, and having a separate area for them until they can go home.

If the student does not have a mask, they should be given one if they begin developing new symptoms (like a cough, fever, runny nose or sore throat) while they wait to go home. Parents should make sure the school has their most up-to-date contact information.

Safety for students with underlying medical conditions

For students with underlying medical conditions or risk factors, parents should consult their child's physician to consider the health risks and make a decision that will best support the child. Contact your child's school to discuss available options and support.

Contact notification in schools

Contact notification identifies groups of individuals who may have been exposed to a COVID-19 case. It focuses on school-based exposures such as classroom cohorts and groups who participated in school sports or school-based extra-curricular activities.

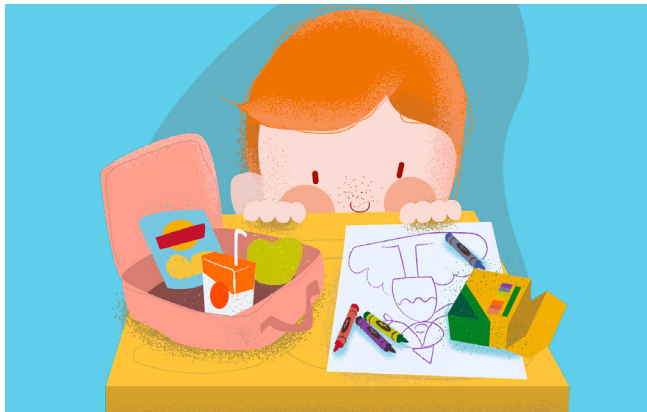
Contact notification will not happen for activities outside of school such as birthday parties or dance lessons. This will be the family's responsibility.

School authorities are notified of any positive cases for all grades (K–12) who were infectious while at school. School authorities and schools have received guidance to assist them in determining who may have been exposed in the school setting.

Shifting to at-home learning

For kindergarten to Grade 6 only, if three or more COVID-19 cases who attended school while infectious are identified in one class within a five-day period, the class will shift to at-home learning for 10 days.

Parents will be notified by the school when the class will shift to at-home learning. Staff members who are fully vaccinated will be able to continue to attend a school building, while those who are not fully vaccinated will be excluded from the school for 10 days.



Public reporting in schools

Public reporting of COVID-19 cases in schools has started again, for each school with at least 2 COVID-19 cases.

Public reporting categories include:

- Alert: 2 to 4 cases
- Alert: 5 to 9 cases
- Outbreak: 10+ cases

Later in 2021, parents will be able to check an online map to view alerts and outbreaks at schools.

See: <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-school-status-map.aspx>

Reporting school outbreaks

School COVID-19 outbreaks are now reported at 10 or more COVID-19 cases within a 14-day period that were infectious while at school.

At-home rapid testing program

Starting in late October, K–6 schools in Alberta that are experiencing outbreaks will have access to at-home rapid test kits for students and staff.

This program is voluntary. More information will be shared on alberta.ca/returntoschool when available.

Taking care of our mental health

Parents are encouraged to talk to their children about how they are feeling, and let them know they are there for them.

If your child needs someone to talk to, they can text CONNECT to the Kids' Help Phone at 686868 or call 1-800-668-6868. This 24/7, free service offers professional counselling, information and referrals. The [Jack.org Alberta COVID-19 Youth Mental Health Resource Hub](https://www.jack.org/alberta-covid-19-youth-mental-health-resource-hub) also has great information for teens on mental health, self-care and supporting others.

If you, as a parent, need someone to talk to, you are encouraged to call the confidential toll-free, 24/7 mental health helpline at 1-877-303-2642. A team that includes nurses, psychologists and social workers attend this line. The AHS website [Help in Tough Times](https://www.alberta.ca/help-in-tough-times) also has helpful information—like the [Text4Hope](https://www.alberta.ca/text4hope) resource, which you can subscribe to for free by texting COVID19HOPE to 393939. It offers supportive text messages written by mental health therapists.

Testing for COVID-19

Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 should fill out the [AHS Online Assessment Tool](https://www.alberta.ca/ahs-online-assessment-tool) to determine if they should be tested and where they can get testing.

If you test positive for COVID-19

Albertans understand that isolating (staying home) and staying away from others is important to limit the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.

Isolation after testing positive for COVID-19 is required for at least 10 days from when the symptoms started, or until they have improved, whichever is longer.

For more details: alberta.ca/returntoschool