

PARENTS' GUIDE 2021–22 SCHOOL YEAR

Information for parents and guardians to prepare for school in September

What to expect

Now that everyone born in 2009 or earlier (12 and over) can get a COVID-19 vaccine, Alberta is shifting from an emergency response for the COVID-19 pandemic to the everyday public health management we use for other viruses, such as influenza. This will allow the province to respond to other respiratory illnesses as we approach fall and winter.



Most Alberta students will return to in-person learning for fall 2021. To reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, schools will use good health practices outlined in the [Guidance for Respiratory Illness Prevention and Management in Schools](#) and follow the [2021–22 School Year Plan](#). This includes:

- Making sure air circulation (HVAC) systems are working properly
- Opening windows and doors, and encourage outdoor activities, when weather permits
- Having procedures on routine cleaning, like regularly wiping down high touch areas and disinfecting
- Encouraging and making it easy for everyone to practice good hand hygiene, like having hand sanitizer stations throughout the school
- Supporting students and staff who want to wear a mask
- Supporting everyone to stay home when sick

Schools will not have to follow previous measures used during the 2020–2021 school year. School authorities continue to have the ability and corresponding accountability to put in place local measures, such as physical distancing, cohorting and masking requirements that may exceed provincial guidance.

School activities

When students return to school, they can look forward to their regular classes and activities such as performances, field trips, sport competitions and celebratory events. Should things change, there are [plans](#) to continue learning with more health measures in place.



For more details: alberta.ca/returntoschool

Good public health practices

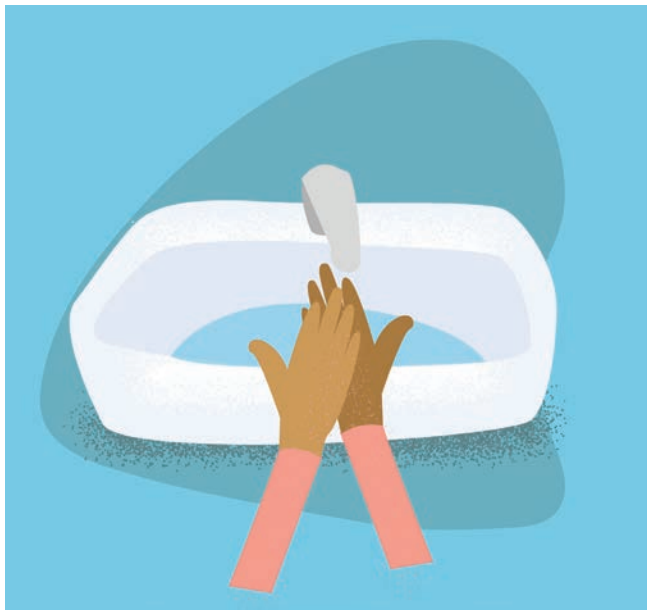
Washing hands and following the school's rules are important ways to keep each other safe.

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

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

If your child has new signs of illness or symptoms, the [Alberta Health Daily 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 yourself and others. Vaccines are safe, effective, and they save lives. Every fall, the [annual influenza vaccine](#) is available to everyone 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 very 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 learn [why the COVID-19 vaccine is safe](#) and familiarize yourself with [common myths and facts](#).

COVID-19 immunization clinics are being planned 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.

How we can protect children who cannot get the vaccine yet

Getting vaccinated reduces the risk to those who cannot get the vaccine yet, such as children born in 2010 or later (11 and under).

Staying home when sick, washing hands and covering coughs and sneezes will reduce the risk of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.

Everyone should take precautions that make sense for them. This may include wearing a face mask, keeping your social circle small, or leaving space between yourself and others in group settings. Schools will support these personal choices, whenever possible.

For more details: alberta.ca/returntoschool

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Masks

Masks are required for all students and staff on school buses.

Unless there is a school-specific rule, students and staff don't have to wear a mask in the school, but will be supported if they choose to.

Masks may be recommended for a short period if there is a respiratory illness outbreak in a school. School authorities may have their own rules for masks, so it's important to know the rules in your school.

It's also important to think about personal risk and your own family's situation when deciding to wear a mask, or asking your child to wear one.

Learn more at alberta.ca/masks.

Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces

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.

Physical distancing or maintaining spacing

Physical distancing or maintaining spacing is not required for the 2021–2022 school year. Some people may prefer to keep more space between themselves and others in certain situations and schools should support this, whenever possible.

Cohorting

Cohorting is not required for the 2021–2022 school year. Cohorting may be recommended for a short period if there is a respiratory illness outbreak in a school.

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 should 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.

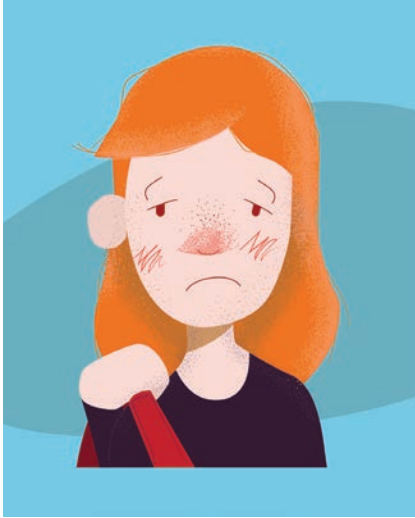
The student or staff member should be given a mask if they begin developing new symptoms (like a cough, fever, runny nose or sore throat) while they wait to go home. Parents should make sure the school has their most up-to-date contact information.



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.

For more details: alberta.ca/returntoschool



If there is an outbreak in your school

Alberta Health Services (AHS) will continue to work with school authorities to manage outbreaks of respiratory illnesses in schools. Schools will let AHS know if 10 per cent of students, or more, are home because they are or might be sick. AHS will investigate and may declare an outbreak of a respiratory illness at school, which may include recommending additional health measures such as:

- Daily health checks
- More cleaning and disinfection
- Staying with a cohort (small group), such as a classroom
- Masking
- Limiting large gatherings and/or extracurricular activities

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 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](#) 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](#) also has helpful information—like the [Text4Hope](#) resource, which you can subscribe to for free by texting 393939. It offers three months of supportive text messages written by mental health therapists.



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Alberta

Testing for COVID-19

Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 should fill out the [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 still required. Cases of COVID-19 are required to isolate for at least 10 days from when their symptoms started, or until their symptoms have improved, whichever is longer.

If you are a close contact

Contact tracing, or the process of identifying close contacts who were exposed to an infected individual, helps to identify potential cases.

As we move into the fall, there will be many different respiratory viruses circulating in Alberta. It is important to build a sustainable approach to these illnesses that does not have disproportionate impacts on learning and development opportunities, such as with quarantining large groups of students and staff.

AHS is no longer identifying or following up with individual close contacts, and quarantine for close contacts is no longer legally mandatory. All Albertans, including those who may be told that they are close contact, are asked to monitor for symptoms and stay home and get tested if they are feeling unwell.

AHS will continue to manage outbreaks of respiratory illnesses in school settings, similar to the management of influenza or influenza-like illness.

If there is an increase in COVID-19

Alberta will be watching for increases in hospitalizations and severe outcomes. Alberta also has programs to monitor wastewater for COVID-19.

Alberta will review new evidence and research across Canada and around the world. If severe illness from COVID-19 is putting pressure on the health care system, public health measures may be needed again.

Alberta will keep watching closely and take whatever actions are needed to manage any high-risk outbreaks, as we do with any communicable disease.