

Education (K-12): Protocols for returning to operation

The following content was posted to WorkSafeBC's website on May 22, 2020. For the most current version, please visit [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

These protocols are for K-12 education providers and include guidance and protocols for teachers, contractors, bus drivers, and others. These employers may also benefit from reviewing protocols related to [office space](#).

This information is based on the BC Centre for Disease Control's [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings](#).

Developing a COVID-19 safety plan

Employers are required to develop a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This plan follows the six steps outlined on [COVID-19 and returning to safe operation](#). Employers must involve frontline workers, joint health and safety committees, and supervisors in identifying protocols for their workplace. You do not need a formal plan in place to begin operation, but are expected to develop it while protecting the safety of your workers.

Employers are not required to submit plans to WorkSafeBC for approval, but in accordance with the order of the [Provincial Health Officer](#), this plan **must be posted** at the worksite. During a WorkSafeBC inspection, we will ask employers about the steps they have taken to protect their workers or to see the plan if it has been developed.

One part of developing your COVID-19 Safety Plan is identifying protocols that everyone at the workplace must follow to keep workers safe. We've provided industry-specific protocols below to consider as you develop the plan for your workplace.

These protocols are not a list of requirements; however, they should be considered and implemented to the extent that they address the risks your workplace. You may need to identify and implement additional protocols if the protocols suggested here do not sufficiently address the risk to your workers.

Understanding the risk

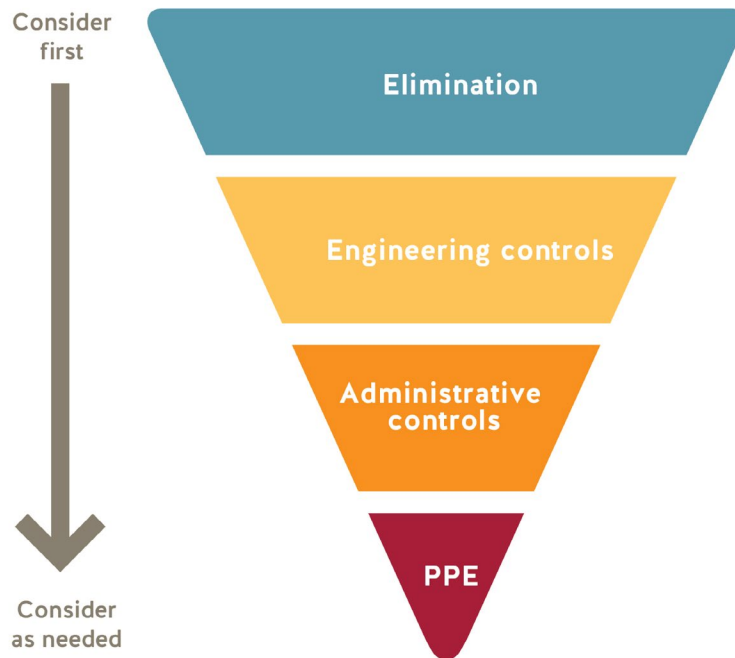
The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads in several ways, including through droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, and from touching a contaminated surface before touching the face. Higher risk situations require adequate protocols to address the risk.

- The risk of person-to-person transmission is increased the closer you come to other people, the amount of time you spend near them, and the number of people you come near. Physical distancing measures help mitigate this risk.

- The risk of surface transmission is increased when many people contact same surface, and when those contacts happen in short intervals of time. Effective cleaning and hygiene practices help mitigate this risk.

Selecting protocols for your workplace

Note that different protocols offer different protection. Wherever possible, use the protocols that offer the highest level of protection and add additional protocols as required.



First level protection (elimination): Use policies and procedures to keep people at a safe physical distance from one another. Limit the number of people in your workplace at any one time, and implement protocols to keep workers at least 2 metres from other workers, customers, and members of the public.

Second level protection (engineering controls): If you can't always maintain physical distancing, install **barriers** such as plexiglass to separate people.

Third level protection (administrative controls): Establish rules and guidelines, such as cleaning protocols, telling workers to not share tools, or implementing one-way doors or walkways.

Fourth level protection (PPE): If the first three levels of protection aren't enough to control the risk, consider the use of **non-medical masks**. Be aware of the limitation of non-medical masks to protect the wearer from respiratory droplets. Ensure workers are **using masks appropriately**.

Protocols for K-12 education

Restricting access to the school

- All workers and students who have symptoms of COVID-19 or have travelled outside Canada in the last 14 days or were identified as a close contact of a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19 must stay home and self-isolate in accordance with guidance from the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#).
- Clearly communicate with parents and caregivers their responsibility to assess their children daily before sending them to school. Alternatively, conduct a daily health check at drop-off by asking parents and caregivers to confirm their child does not have symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other respiratory disease.
- Parents and caregivers must assess their child daily for symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other infectious respiratory disease before sending them to school. If a student develops symptoms while at home, parents or caregivers must keep their child at home until they have been assessed by a health care provider to exclude COVID-19 or other infectious diseases, and their symptoms have resolved.
- Develop a procedure for workers to follow to have a student picked up by their parent or caregiver as soon as possible, should they develop symptoms associated with COVID-19 infection while in care. Apply physical distancing, respiratory etiquette, and hand hygiene principles while waiting for pick up. Contact 811 or the local public health unit to notify them of a potential case and seek further input. For additional information and guidance in developing this procedure, refer to [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings](#).

Administration areas

- Limit the public coming into the office. Encourage parents and others to call instead of visiting the school.
- Designate a 2 metre area in front of or behind a kiosk. Consider the use of tape or other floor markers to designate where people can stand and line up (if required).
- Plexiglass may be used to separate administrative workers from the public if two metres of separation cannot be maintained.

Student management and hygiene

Hygiene

- Develop policies around when students should wash their hands. This should include, at minimum:
 - » When they arrive at school and before they go home
 - » Before eating and drinking
 - » After using the toilet
 - » After sneezing or coughing into hands or tissue
 - » Whenever hands are visibly dirty
 - » When moving between different learning environments (e.g., outdoor-indoor transitions, from the gym to the classroom).
- Workers should assist younger students with hand hygiene as needed.
- If a sink is not available use alcohol based hand sanitizer. Antiseptic agents are to be used as a last line of defense only.
- Food should not be shared by students.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables with soap and cold water then rinse before consuming.
- Place all parent provided food items in a designated, delineated and freshly sanitized tabletop/

countertop area labelled “Incoming Food” upon arrival.

Physical distancing

- Parents and caregivers should remain outside of the school to drop off their children.
- Avoid close greetings like hugs or handshakes and remind students to keep their hands to themselves when possible.
- Consider using educational videos and online programs as a part of learning so young students can sit independently and distanced from each other.
- Consider teaching classes outside when practicable.
- Incorporate more individual activities or activities that encourage more space between students and staff. For younger students, adapt group activities to minimize physical contact and reduce shared items. For adolescent students, minimize group activities and avoid activities that require physical contact.
- Organize students into smaller groups that stay together throughout the day.
- Strive to minimize the number of different teacher(s) and educational assistant(s) that interact with groups of students throughout the day.
- Consider different classroom configurations to maintain distance between students or different locations in the school (e.g., different classrooms, gym or library, outside).
- Discourage any food or drink sharing.
- Eliminate group food preparation activities.
- Stagger recess/snack, lunch, and class transition times to provide a greater amount of space for everyone.

Safety for staff

Physical distancing

- Establish and post occupancy limits for shared spaces such as lunch rooms and break rooms. Consider removing chairs or tables to ensure occupancy limits are not exceeded. If possible, provide additional areas for workers to have their breaks, including outside areas if available.
- Stagger start and end of shift times as well as break times for workers to prevent crowding when entering and leaving the workplace.
- Maintain 2 metre physical distancing whenever possible between workers and students. Consider the use of virtual meetings or other means to reduce the number of staff onsite. Modify work processes and practices to encourage physical distancing between staff and student, and other workers.
- Provide instructions to workers on methods for maintaining physical distance such as not greeting others by hugging or shaking hands.
- If workers need to meet in person, ensure there is a 2 metre space between each worker.
- Manage the flow of people in public spaces such as hallways and on stairs, consider the use of one-way systems.
- Assemblies and other school-wide events should be held virtually to avoid a large number of people gathered in one space.

- If staff need to travel between worksites, maintain physical distance in vehicles wherever possible. Consider separate vehicles if possible. Larger vehicles may be able to accommodate physical distancing by using a seat configuration that maximizes distance between people.

Hygiene

- Encourage workers and students to remain on site and not to leave during lunch or at break times.
- Ensure hand washing supplies are available at all times (i.e., soap, clean towels, paper towels and, if needed, 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer).
- Develop and establish handwashing policies and procedures for all staff and others at the school. WorkSafeBC [handwashing signage](#) is provided to communicate good handwashing practices. Post handwashing signs near all sinks. Workers, including teachers, administrators and support workers should wash their hands frequently to reduce the risk of transmission.
- Ensure workers are provided with appropriate supplies and facilities with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes. Hand hygiene stations should be set up at the school entrance and other locations as appropriate.
- Consider the maximum number of workers and students required to wash their hands at peak times and ensure that sufficient hand washing or sanitizing stations are available for these times.
- Promote effective hygiene practices. Refer to [WorkSafeBC's hygiene practices signage](#).

Use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

- [BC Centre for Disease Control \(BCCDC\) guidance](#) for K-12 school settings is that personal protective equipment, such as masks and gloves are not needed, beyond those used by staff as part of regular precautions for the hazards normally encountered in their regular course of work.
- Where PPE has been identified for tasks prior to COVID-19 pandemic, continue to use this PPE when performing these tasks.

Cleaning and sanitizing

- Schools should be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with the BC CDC's [Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings](#). Cleaning practices should be in line with the provincial health officer's [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Childcare Settings](#).
- Develop a cleaning policy that focuses on high-traffic areas and high-contact surfaces such as doors and cabinet handles, stair railings, washrooms, shared office spaces, desks, keyboards, light switches, and communications devices.
- Set up a cleaning and disinfecting schedule so that high touch surfaces are frequently cleaned during the day. General cleaning and disinfecting of the premises should occur at least once a day. Frequently-touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day.
- Remove shared items where cross-contamination is possible (e.g., shared school supplies, coffee and water stations, and snack bins).
- Incorporate end-of-shift wipe downs for all shared spaces.
- Empty your garbage containers often (at least daily).
- Clean and disinfect cots and mattresses prior to use and after they are used or soiled. Use single use only pillow cases and blankets and dispose of them immediately after single use. Where pillow cases and blankets are not single use, launder between each student.

- Providing adequate instruction, training, and supplies to custodians on the cleaning protocols developed for the workplace.

Buses and school transportation

- Clean and disinfect the high touch areas of the bus at the start of your shift and after drop offs. Buses used for transporting students should be cleaned and disinfected according to the guidance provided in the BC CDC's [Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings](#) document.
- Encouraging private vehicle use where possible to decrease transportation density.
- Have students sit in their own seat wherever possible, students from the same household can share seats if space is limited.
- If safe distances cannot be maintained between students and bus drivers, plexiglass **barriers** may be erected provided they do not obstruct the view of the driver or the safe operation of the vehicle.

Communication strategies

- Remind staff that all health and safety measures in place prior to the pandemic are still in place.
- Attempt to mitigate staff confusion and concerns by communicating essential health and safety information to them in writing before they return to the workplace. If possible, give staff an appropriate amount of time to review this material, and to respond with questions.
- Upon first return to the workplace, hold a health and safety meeting to review workplace practices relating to COVID-19 and other health and safety matters. Additional communication may be required as new information is made available that may affect work practices.
- Daily check-in meeting with workers to provide them with new information and review any concerns.
- Ensure that parents and caregivers understand your policy that students must stay home if they are sick.
- Minimize the number of non-essential people coming into the school such as parents and caregivers and contractors.
- Keep parents and caregivers informed about what you are doing in your educational setting regarding taking extra precautions.
- Ensure that workers know how to raise safety concerns. This may be through your joint health and safety committee.
- Establishing a central location where new information is posted relating to COVID-19 in your workplace.

Documentation and training

- Train your workers on:
 - » The risk of exposure to COVID-19 and the signs and symptoms of the disease.
 - » Safe work procedures or instruction to be followed, including hand washing and cough/sneeze etiquette.
 - » How to report an exposure to or symptoms of COVID-19.
 - » Changes you've made to work policies, practices, and procedures due to the COVID-19 pandemic and keep records of that training.

- » Document COVID-19 related meetings and post minutes at a central location.
- Keep records of instruction and training provided to workers regarding COVID-19, as well as reports of exposure and first aid records.

Safety responsibilities by role

Employer (school district)

- Select, implement, and document risk assessments and appropriate site-specific control measures.
- Ensure that all resources (information, authorization administrative changes, technology, training, human resources) and materials (personal protective equipment, equipment, cleaning and disinfecting products and systems) required to implement and maintain plan are reasonably made available as practical when required.
- Ensure that supervisors and workers are informed about the content of safety policies.
- Conduct a periodic review the effectiveness of the plan. This includes a review of the available control technologies to ensure that these are selected and used when practical.
- Maintain records of training and inspections.
- Re-examine all tasks in the workplace, especially those that require the direct care of students, and ensure that safe work procedures are updated with COVID-19 practices.
- Where possible, have workers perform only essential tasks to maintain the student's education and well-being. Tasks that are non-essential should be put on hold until directed otherwise by the provincial health officer.

Supervisors (principals and vice principals)

- Ensure that workers are knowledgeable regarding the controls required to minimize their risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Direct work in a manner that eliminates or minimizes the risk to workers.
- Post or relay educational and informational material in an accessible area for workers to review.

Workers (teachers, education assistants, support staff and outside contractors)

- Know the controls required to minimize their risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Participate in COVID-19 related training and instruction.
- Follow established work procedures and instructions as directed by the employer or supervisor.
- Report any unsafe conditions or acts to the supervisor.
- Know how and when to report exposure incidents.

Service operations managers (operations forepersons)

- Maintaining an inventory of PPE for custodians, **cleaning and disinfectant products**, and well-maintained equipment used for cleaning and disinfecting.
- Providing adequate instruction to custodians on the hazards associated with cleaning work areas and on the safe work procedures specified in this exposure control plan.
- Directing the work in a manner that ensures the risk to custodians is minimized and adequately controlled.

- Revising the work schedule to ensure priority intensive cleaning of impacted work area surfaces and touch points.

Additional information

The following links may have additional information, guidance, or resources that may assist you in the development of your plan.

- [COVID-19: Public Health Guidance for K-12 School Settings](#)
- [Childcare and Schools \(BC CDC\)](#)
- [Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings \(BC CDC\)](#)

For more information

The information on this page is based on current recommendations and may change. For the latest guidance, please see the health information from the [British Columbia Centre for Disease Control](#) and the latest news from the [government of British Columbia](#).

If you have a question or concern

Workers and employers with questions or concerns about workplace exposure to COVID-19 can call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line at 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland (toll-free within B.C. at 1.888.621.SAFE). You'll be able to speak to a prevention officer to get answers to your questions, and if required, a prevention officer will be assigned to assess the health and safety risk at your workplace.

Resources

COVID-19: A guide to reducing the risk

This resource is for employers, outlining the steps to follow to make sure you are minimizing the risk of COVID-19 so your business can operate safely.

COVID-19 Safety Plan

Employers are required to develop a COVID-19 Safety Plan that outlines the policies, guidelines, and procedures they have put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This tool will guide...

Help prevent the spread of COVID-19: Cover coughs and sneezes

This poster reminds workers and visitors to cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze, and to wash their hands afterward.

[See more resources](#)