

**BACK TO SCHOOL****SYNOPSIS**

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has developed guidance for administrators of schools from kindergarten to grade 12 and local public health authorities to support the resumption of in-school educational programming during the COVID-19 outbreak.

**POTENTIAL QUESTION**

What is the Government doing to support the reopening of schools?

**KEY MESSAGES**

- Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadians have made many sacrifices to maintain the well-being of their families.
- To support the resumption of in-school programming, the Public Health Agency of Canada has released guidance for public health authorities and administrators of schools, from kindergarten to grade 12.
- As new evidence emerges, and as we learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions, this guidance may evolve.

***IF PRESSED ON THE GUIDANCE***

- The guidance recommends that schools work with their local public health authorities to:
  - Consider potential risks and mitigation strategies associated with resuming in-person classes; and
  - Implement a layered approach of public health measures to help protect students and staff.
- This layered approach helps minimize the risk of transmission, as a combination of public health measures is more effective than single measures on their own.
- Specific guidance from provincial and territorial health authorities, ministries of education and Indigenous community governance structures will also support the reopening of schools.

***IF PRESSED ON ROLE OF CHILDREN IN TRANSMISSION***

- Our understanding of COVID-19 transmission in children is still evolving, and evidence may change with time.
- Children, especially those under 10 years of age, appear to experience less severe illness, and they represent a small proportion of reported cases to date.
- Emerging evidence suggests the virus can spread efficiently in all age groups, and children over 10 years of age may be as likely as adults to transmit the virus to others.

- Children under 10 years can also transmit the virus, but may be less likely to do so than adults.

## **BACKGROUND**

Education is a provincial jurisdiction. Provinces and territories will make plans according to their realities and local circumstances. Advice from local public health authorities and boards of education should drive back-to-school decisions.

To support the resumption of school during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has developed guidance for administrators of schools (from kindergarten to grade 12) and local public health authorities. This guidance, developed collaboratively with provinces and territories, provides strategies to help administrators and local public health authorities understand, assess, and mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission in classrooms and other school settings.

PHAC recommends that schools work with their local public health authorities and implement multiple concurrent mitigation strategies to help protect students and staff. This layered approach helps minimize the risk of transmission since combinations of several public health measures are more effective than single measures.

The guidance provides age-appropriate examples of how schools can implement risk mitigation measures such as:

- flexible attendance/absenteeism policies (to ensure people who are ill, or who have an exposure history or vulnerability do not have to enter the school setting);
- physical distancing in the classroom and throughout the school setting;
- separating people from each other through physical barriers;
- maintaining good hand and respiratory hygiene;
- environmental cleaning;
- minimizing contact with others through cohorting and small group sizes; and
- wearing non-medical masks or cloth face coverings, according to age and setting.

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