

From: Department of Health and Community Services,
Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health

To: Parents and Guardians

Re: COVID-19 Back to School Guide for Parents of Children with Specialized
HealthCare Needs.

Date: September 8, 2020

As students across Canada get ready to head back to school – some after nearly six months of being away – parents have many questions. The first is usually, “Is it safe to send my child back to school during the pandemic?”

The situation in your community:

The risk of COVID-19 related illness in schools depends on how much virus is in a community. Your local public health authority is the best source of this information and is giving updated guidance to schools as the pandemic evolves.

Right now, the number of people affected with COVID-19 in Newfoundland and Labrador is very low. Schools have protocols in place to reduce the risk of transmission, and there are plans to keep school partially open or closed completely if local outbreaks occur.

Your child’s overall health and well-being:

School closures, along with other restrictions on activities and socializing, may affect children’s physical, social, and emotional well-being. There are potentially serious consequences for children not attending school. This is true for child care as well, where optimal language and social development requires interaction with other children.

With all these considerations in mind, we recommend:

1. While locally there is a low spread of COVID-19 and the full school reopening model is in effect, attendance at school is recommended for all children and youth including those with immunocompromising conditions who would usually attend school.
2. Hand hygiene, keeping your distance, mask wearing and following other Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health and Public Health Agency of Canada recommendations are important for **all family members**. These are the most important measures for decreasing the risk of transmission of COVID-19.
3. If your child has an existing care plan on file please contact your local school if updates are needed.
4. Do not stop chemotherapy, radiation or other medication that interacts with the immune system to try to “strengthen” your child’s immune system.

5. Discuss use of any “immune boosting” therapies with your Physician, Nurse Practitioner or Medical Care Team. These may not be safe for your child.
6. Ensure all your child’s regular vaccinations are up to date. **All family members should receive the influenza vaccine in the fall.**
7. If your child is sick, do not send them to school or child care. Follow the [school screening questionnaire](#) and if indicated complete the self-assessment tool <https://www.811healthline.ca/covid-19-self-assessment/>
8. If school changes to a partial/blended model due to increased COVID-19 transmission, children with immunocompromising conditions may benefit from remote learning opportunities. Considerations related to siblings of immunocompromised students and/or other family members living in the home who are immunocompromised should be discussed with your health care provider.
9. Recommendations may change if community spread increases in Newfoundland and Labrador. Please be aware of new public health announcements.

In general, children who have asthma, diabetes, congenital heart disease, autism, epilepsy, neuromuscular disorders, and other chronic conditions are not considered significantly immunocompromised. If you have questions about whether your child is considered immunocompromised or not, please consult your health care provider.

We recommend using the following resources to find accurate information about Newfoundland and Labrador’s Public Health measures and back-to-school plans:

Newfoundland and Labrador Covid-19 website:

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>

Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools:

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/Public-Health-Guidance-for-K-12-Schools.pdf>

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District – A Safe Return to School Plan:

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/Safe-Return-to-School-Reopening-Plan.pdf>

Back to School with Rheumatic Disease: Guidance and Reminders for Families

<https://covid19.cassieandfriends.ca/blog/back-to-school-covid-19>

Departments of Education and Health and Community Services, in consultation with the Janeway Child Health Center, has adapted for local use: *Returning to School in the Maritime Provinces: Guidance for children who are immune compromised from the IWK Health Center (24 August 2020)*, which was prepared by the pediatric Infectious Diseases Division and the Hematology Oncology Division of IWK, in partnership with the N.S. Pediatric Provincial Advisory group.