

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

To: Parents and Guardians

Re: School Re-Entry Plan during the COVID-19 Pandemic Information for Parents

Date: September 3, 2020

The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Department of Health and Community Services, in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), continues to monitor the developing COVID-19 pandemic. Cases continue to occur around the world, with noted declines in certain provinces and territories within Canada, including Newfoundland and Labrador. Most cases in this province have been linked to travel or contact with a known case of COVID-19. As a result, COVID-19 remains in low prevalence within our province. Diligence in following preventative measures is crucial in decreasing the spread of this virus.

As a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the 2020-2021 school year may look a little different. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Health and Community Services will continue to work closely and monitor the situation and adjust plans as necessary to ensure the safety of students and staff, while learning to live with COVID-19. Enhanced cleaning practices to support infection prevention and control have been put in place, as well as the use of personal protective equipment, where deemed necessary. Public health measures including physical distancing, cohorting of classes, good hand hygiene, good respiratory etiquette and staying home when sick have also been recommended. Special measures will be utilized if students or staff develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 while at school, ensuring that safe practices are maintained and communication with parents/guardians is open at all times.

If a positive COVID-19 case or contact of a case is identified in the school environment, public health officials will work closely with regional medical officers of health to determine additional steps that may be required. If it is determined through public health's contact tracing investigation that a student and/or staff is considered at risk, direct contact will be made with parents/guardians by a public health official. Public health officials will work with families to determine next steps. Student and staff confidentiality will continue to be an utmost priority for public health.

Services provided by public health within the school environment will be adjusted as well. At this time, public health's focus will be on influenza immunization, contact tracing, and follow up required for COVID-19 cases and contacts. The current role of the public health nurse in assisting parents in teaching specific health procedures to support staff for students with special health needs (e.g. tube feeding) will not change at this time. Other health promotion services may be impacted. School age immunizations will continue, but may be delivered in a different format than in previous years. More information will be provided regarding school age immunizations at a later date.

We understand the COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful. If you or someone in your family are experiencing a high degree of uncertainty, worry, anxiety and stress about the health and safety of your loved ones, we encourage you to visit the following website dedicated to mental health and wellness www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/individuals-and-households/mental-health-and-wellness/.

For questions related to COVID-19, we encourage you to visit our COVID-19 website at: <https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/>.

Once again, I want to take the opportunity to thank you for your patience as we navigate these uncertain times together. Your hard work and dedication has brought us to this point where we can safely return children to school and support their healthy development.