

[As announced by the Province](#) earlier today, per an Order from the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, the resumption of all K-12 classes in B.C. will occur in a phased approach with all students returning to school on Monday, January 10th.

Return to school for students in K-12 education is being delayed in order to give public health and B.C. schools additional time to assess the impacts of the Omicron variant on communities and schools, and to implement enhanced safety plans to support the safe continuation of in-class learning.

During this time, schools will be open for limited numbers of students in particular need. Districts will be communicating out to families about how this process will work.

Districts that operate child care are encouraged to keep them open next week to support families that need care.

Schools are to use this administrative time to understand and assess the impact of the Omicron variant on students, teachers and staff over the holiday break, determine their workforce needs; implement continuity of learning planning; develop communications plans for families in the event of school closures; reach out to students and families; and to consider transportation and meal planning in the event of workforce issues or closures.

In addition to the PHO Order today, BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has developed an [Addendum – Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) to ensure schools have effective measures in place to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

To ensure continued alignment with BCCDC direction, an [addendum](#) to the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#) has been created. It outlines focused actions and additional prevention measures B.C. public and independent K-12 schools must implement in response to the recent rise of cases of COVID-19 due to the emergence of the more transmissible Omicron variant. With the spread of the more transmissible Omicron virus, we are providing clear direction to schools on extra precautions to keep schools safe for students, teachers and staff.

Districts are expected to have clear plans in place for the appropriate use of these administrative days including reviewing updates to the Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 settings and updating health and safety plans if required. All staff are required to attend staff meetings and planning meetings to review health and safety protocols and to plan for the continuity of instruction.

Enhanced safety measures include:

- Strategies that prevent crowding during class transition times.
- Hold school gatherings and events (e.g., assemblies, etc.) virtually; if they must be in-person, limit the number of people to no more than 50% operating capacity.
- Hold staff-only gatherings (e.g., meetings, professional development activities) virtually where possible.
- Limit visitors to those who are supporting activities that directly benefit student learning and wellbeing (e.g., teacher candidates, immunizers, meal program volunteers, etc.)
- Pause extracurricular sports tournaments.

The guidelines build on existing protocols that have succeeded in minimizing the spread of the virus in schools such as:

- Encouraging everyone who is eligible, to get fully vaccinated
- Doing daily health checks, and staying home when sick
- Using available space to spread out, and to respect others personal space.
- Wearing masks in accordance with the [Provincial Health Officer Order on Face Coverings](#)
- Cleaning hands regularly
- Cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces at least once a day

The delay will also allow more students to be vaccinated – which remains the best protection against severe outcomes from COVID-19.

The safety of students and staff is paramount, so as we have done from the beginning, we will continue to make decisions based on the latest health data and the expert advice of Dr. Henry and her public health team.