

October 4, 2021

Dear parents, students and staff:

Here is an important update to the [Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) and the [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#) by Minister of Education Jennifer Whiteside and Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry.

I would like to inform parents about this update and outline the notification process for school exposures.

Update to face coverings mandate

The provincial government has announced **that as of Monday, October 4, 2021, all students in B.C. schools will be required to wear a mask when inside a school building, at their desks and on busses.**

This builds on the existing guidelines that currently apply to all students in Grades 4-12. Kindergarten to Grade 3 students wearing a mask will be an adjustment for our students. As our younger students adjust to wearing masks, please send your child(ren) to school with a clean mask and a spare mask that they can wear.

As a reminder, provincial guidelines advise that mask requirements do not apply to staff, students, and visitors in the following circumstances:

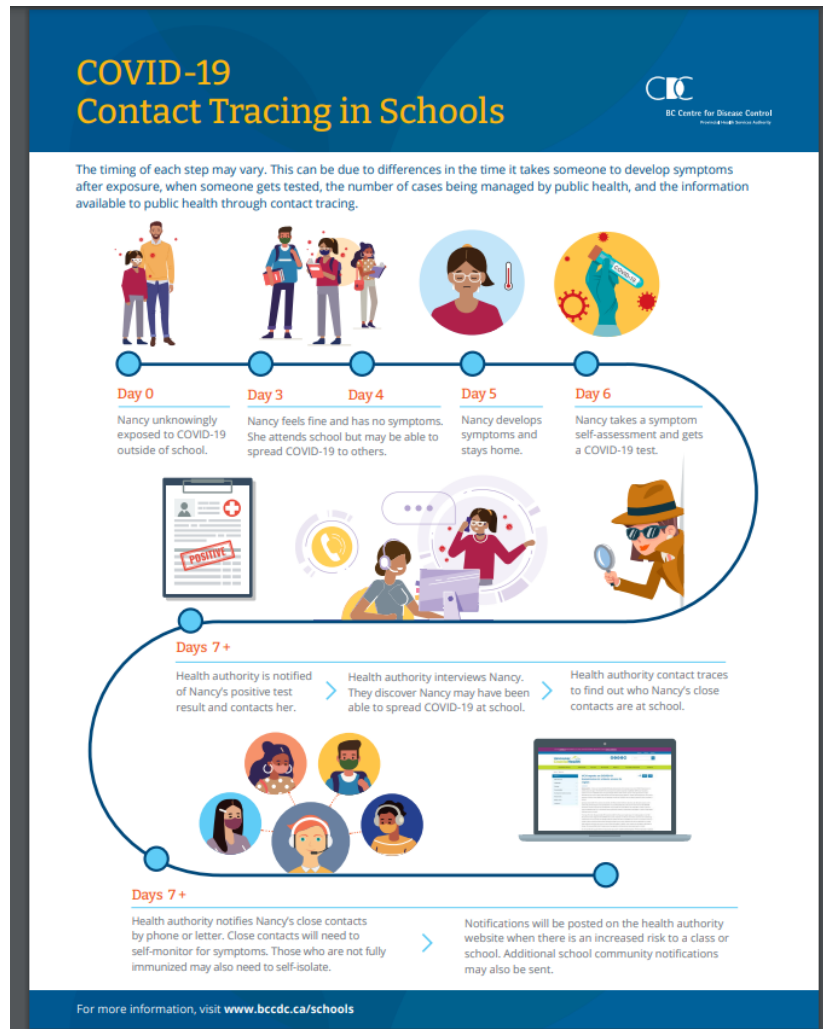
- If a person cannot tolerate wearing a mask for health or behavioural reasons
- If a person is unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person
- If the mask is removed temporarily for the purposes of identifying the person wearing it
- If the mask is removed temporarily to engage in an educational activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask
- If a person is eating or drinking
- If a person is behind a barrier
- If providing a service to a person with a disability or diverse ability where visual cues, facial expressions and/or lip reading/movements is important.

Schools continue to be encouraged to support student mask use through positive and inclusive approaches, and not punitive or enforcement activities that exclude students from fully participating in school or that could result in stigma. Schools are also encouraged to ensure there are opportunities throughout the day for students to remove their masks (like providing opportunities to go outside if weather allows).

School Exposures:

We have been seeing multiple exposures in 5 of our schools, as well as some single COVID cases in other schools.

This is Interior Health's process of contact tracing in schools:



I also wanted to inform parents about what we do behind the scenes when we receive information on a COVID case:

I receive an email from Interior Health regarding a COVID case; at this point, we may already have heard from a parent that they have a child with COVID or the principal has already sent us the information. We then wait for Interior Health to start their process. Interior Health indicated to me that once they get the case, they work with the case until completed. Their goal is to complete within 48 hours from the start of the case (this depends on the number of cases in the community and school). I receive emails from them 7 days a week and at all hours of the day.

They will ask for specific details on the case. For example: what was the class doing, who was in the classroom, where did the students go, did they ride the bus, and what type of activities the class was doing

during specific days. They may also ask us for the contact information on individual adults and students who may have been in contact with the individual.

I send the notification with instructions from the contact tracer to the principal and vice principal immediately. The team then follows the email instructions and sends it back to the COVID team at Interior Health. We then wait for instructions on next steps.

A next step may be that there is no further action required. This will mean that the individual was not infectious at school. We will let the teacher know if it is a student in the class, that they had an individual with COVID, but no further action is required; or we send a few different letters home - one is if there is a need to self monitor or another if a class will need to isolate. Those who are not vaccinated will also need to isolate. This will be indicated in the letter.

The principal and vice principal will then start to contact anyone who will need this information. They will inform the school staff and parents. The district will inform itinerants, unions, etc.

The provincial government recently made a change to the notification process for school exposures, directing local health authorities to begin posting general school exposure notifications to their websites. Exposure notifications for our school district and the Interior Health region can be found on the [Interior Health school exposures page](#) and the front page of our [website](#). For a helpful overview of the contact tracing process visit the [BCCDC website](#).

As you can see from the website, we have had schools with exposures. There have now been a few cases in our district where classes are isolating at home and the teacher is teaching remotely.

Through all our work with Interior Health and all my conversations with nurses, Medical Health Officers and contact tracers, everyone is working hard to support our schools. I wanted to give a big thank you to them for all their work. While sometimes there may be concern with delays, please be assured that there is a lot of work that is happening behind the scenes to support our district and the other districts in the province. We start to see delays when we get more cases in our schools or community.

I am encouraging us all to continue to be diligent with our health and safety protocols and guidelines. This is not where we thought we would be, but if we are diligent, we can do this together. Please continue to do the daily health checks as no student or staff can come to school sick. The concerns we are hearing are at sleepovers, large birthday parties, and gatherings where there may be unvaccinated individuals who have COVID. We all need to decide what level of risk we wish to take within the guidelines.

Please continue all the good work you have been doing to keep your children and our schools safe. Everyone comes from a different place, and we need to respect where they are coming from. We will get through this together.

All the best and take care,

Silke