



NOTE: This document provides guidance on safety precautions for school settings for parents and families. Please note, the provincial government may adjust guidelines in response to an increase in provincial case numbers. In the event that any changes affect our message, this document will be adjusted as needed – please check back regularly for updates.

Grey Bruce families have been making difficult decisions about returning to school during COVID-19. Everyone's situation is different and the decision to send your children to school needs to be one that works for you and your family. Returning to school is important for the well-being and education of our children and youth. However, as more spaces open for people to gather, the potential to spread the virus increases. Fortunately, there are a number of actions schools and health officials can take to help prevent transmission of COVID-19.

I have a concern about my school - who should I contact?

If you can't find the answer in the Ministry's Return to School guidance or your School Board's guidance documents, contact the principal of your school.

If there is a sick student in my child's class, will I be contacted or given any notice? Where can I go with my questions?

Public Health will investigate and connect with anyone they consider a close contact to a suspected or confirmed person who has COVID-19. Public Health will provide advice about self-isolation or self-monitoring depending on the individual situation. Public

Health will provide a timely announcement if a person is confirmed to have COVID-19. You can call the COVID-19 hotline at Public Health with any questions at 1-800-263-3456 extension 3000.

Why isn't asymptomatic testing being done for all students/staff?

Asymptomatic testing is not validated to be used on people without symptoms or risk of exposure. The test is not pleasant and may be hard on young children, both physically and emotionally.

Getting a COVID-19 test would be appropriate and strongly recommended only in the following two scenarios:

1. Public Health has let you know that you are a Close Contact to someone who has COVID-19, based on a thorough risk assessment. Deciding who is a Close Contact is a decision that can only be made by Public Health.
2. Your health care provider has told you to get tested because you have COVID-19 related symptoms.

My COVID-19 test comes back negative - what does this mean?

This is good news. Negative means you did not have the virus at the time of testing. If you still have symptoms, you will need to stay at home. You must be 24 hours symptom free before returning to school.

If the child is COVID negative, the bug may be a common cold or other respiratory virus. In that case, if the child goes back to class, there is a good chance they may infect other children. Although we know it is not COVID, these infected children will be considered as COVID until proven otherwise. For the sake of one child returning a couple of days early, several more children may end up being sent home for a week or more. It is better to keep a child home until they are symptom free.

In the Grey Bruce area, can all students return to school in-person?

All schools will open with increased health and safety standards. The Ministry of Education has indicated that in-person attendance is voluntary for the 2020-2021 school year and that remote learning will be available. In Grey Bruce, elementary and secondary students will attend school 5 days per week.

What factors should parents and guardians consider when deciding to have their child return to school in person or use remote learning?

There are many factors to consider in the decision to return to school in person or through virtual learning options. Parents and guardians will have to decide what is best for their children and family. Parents are advised to speak with their family's health care provider about conditions that may put your child at risk.

When weighing your options, consider the following risk factors related to return to learning:

- Your child's medical health. We encourage you to consult with your health care provider.
- Your child's close contacts and their health conditions
- Your family's ability to find child care
- Your family's ability to guide learning at home
- Whether your child has developmental needs that require in-class learning with a trained professional.

What is the Grey Bruce Health Unit doing to prepare for the return to school?

For many weeks, Public Health has been working closely with school officials to support return to school planning for a safe and caring learning environment. We will continue to work together to best position our schools for a safe and successful reopening. The health, safety, and well-being of students, teachers, staff, and their families are the most important consideration in making decisions regarding school reopening.

How can I find out more details about the return to school plans for my child's school?

For information from your local school board visit:

Bluewater District School Board https://www.bwdsb.on.ca/Parents/Return_to_School

Bruce Grey Catholic School Board <https://www.bgcdsb.org/>

Conseil scolaire catholique Providence <https://www.cscprovidence.ca/>

Screening

Will there be COVID-19 screening before entering a school building?

Yes. Students, teachers and all school staff must use [Ontario's COVID-19 School Screening tool](#) every day before going to school. The tool will help determine if a child should be staying home or attending school. Stay at home when you are sick, even if symptoms are mild.

What efforts will be made by the school to determine which symptoms are COVID-19 related and which are not?

The Ministry of Health has outlined the symptoms commonly associated with COVID-19. The most recent list of COVID-19 symptoms can be found on their [website](#). Schools are not able to determine if symptoms are due to COVID-19 or other reasons. To prevent outbreaks it is best to strive to have no symptomatic individuals within the school regardless of whether it is due to COVID-19 or not.

When should students be screened?

All students, staff, and essential visitors must complete a COVID-19 screening questionnaire daily before going to school. Parents and guardians should screen children prior to them getting on the school bus. The new interactive COVID-19 screening tool for students, parents and teachers is available at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>.

How should I respond if I fail the screening?

Anyone with any COVID-19 symptoms, as per the screening questionnaire, is to remain at home and self-isolate for 14 days, or until they receive their negative results and are asymptomatic for 24 hours. It is advised that individuals see their medical professional or go to an Assessment Centre to be tested. [Assessment Centres](#) are found at the following locations:

- Owen Sound Regional Hospital, Grey Bruce Health Services
- Kincardine Hospital, South Bruce Grey Health Centre Location

- Hanover and District Hospital

Certain health conditions like migraines, asthma, or allergies may lead to students or staff failing the screening. A health care provider with access to a relevant medical history can help determine whether symptoms that have existed for months or years are consistent with another health condition. If such clearance for chronic disease from a healthcare provider is not available, a symptomatic student and school staff will only be permitted to return to school if:

- They have received a negative COVID test result and has been symptom free for 24 hours AND are able to pass the Provincial Screening Tool.

Or

- They have remained in home isolation for 14 days from the onset of symptoms AND are symptom-free for 24 hours before returning to school.

All asymptomatic members of the same household are to self-monitor for 14 days and take appropriate precautions should symptoms appear. Asymptomatic students in the same household may return to school and do not require a COVID-19 test.

Masks

Do students need to wear masks?

Students in Grades 4 to 12 will be required to wear a non-medical or cloth mask when indoors, with exceptions for medical reasons. Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will be encouraged, but not required to wear masks in indoor spaces. Outdoor times like recess can be used as opportunities to provide students with breaks from wearing masks; physical distancing must be maintained at these times.

Will teachers and staff wear masks?

Yes. All school-based staff should wear masks, with exceptions for medical reasons.

What are exemptions on the requirements to wear masks?

Exemptions may include:

- Respiratory conditions that interfere with a person's ability to breathe while wearing a mask such as severe asthma.
- If a person is not able to remove a mask if required.
- Anxiety and behavioural conditions such as a child with autism spectrum disorder with significant sensory concerns.
- Wearing a mask or face covering interferes with a necessary medical device.

Should my child take extra cloth masks for the day?

Face coverings, such as cloth masks, should be changed when they get slightly wet or dirty. It would be advisable that each child would have a spare cloth mask. Extra masks may be available at your child's school in the event that their mask needs changed and a spare one is not available. Keep in mind children are exploratory and will share, or try on each other's masks, we could have a statement about not sharing masks.

How should my child store their mask when not in use?

Face coverings should be stored in a labelled bag or washable container. They should not be stored in a lunch bag.

Physical Distancing

How will physical distancing be supported in schools?

Schools should have:

- signs to reinforce distancing and one-way use of hallways
- adjustments to entrance and exit practices
- adjustments to the use of playgrounds and school grounds

Is physical distancing important?

Yes. Schools should maintain as much distancing as possible. Optimal physical distancing is not always operationally possible and other measures, such as masking and cohorting, are important to limit the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

What about Social Circles – are they still in place during school reopening?

- Yes - [social circles](#) of up to 10 people you can hug and touch remain in place.
- Follow current provincial guidance on [social circles](#).

How can shared spaces be used safely?

Promoting physical distancing as much as possible. Keeping a 2-metre (6 ft) distance from others helps to reduce the spread of illness; however, it is not always practical in child and youth settings. Using a combination of other strategies like mask wearing and cohorting helps to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 in these settings when physical distancing is difficult.

Reinforcing changes to common practices to maintain physical distancing, such as replacing physical greetings like high fives, fist bumps and hugs with friendly verbal greetings or virtual high fives.

Restricting or managing flow of people in common areas including hallways, entrances/foyers (e.g. with entry and exit procedures) by using visual cues to encourage physical distancing (e.g., accessible signage, floor markings). In narrow hallways or aisles, encourage unidirectional travel where possible by painting or placing arrows on the ground and/or at eye level.

Postponing assemblies, team sports or extracurricular activities where physical distancing may be a challenge.

Establishing a process for essential visits (e.g. parents picking up children outside of drop-off and pick-up hours where physical distancing can be maintained).

Older children and youth:

- assess whether infrastructure can be enhanced, even temporarily, to provide more space, e.g., portables, repurposing existing space

- increase desk distance as much as possible between children and youth
- stagger break times where children come together (e.g., recess, lunch)
- install accessible signage or floor markings to restrict or manage flow of common areas including hallways, cafeteria, dining halls, foyers, atriums
- implement locker and change room policies if applicable

Hand Hygiene

How can hand hygiene be supported?

Schools should:

- train students on appropriate hand hygiene
- schedule breaks to allow students to wash their hands
- make hand sanitizer available in bathrooms

See these resources about hand hygiene:

Ireland Department of Health - [Why Soap is so Effective Against COVID-19](#)

World Health Organization - [How to Handwash](#)

Cleaning and Disinfection

How often should surfaces be cleaned and disinfected?

High touch surfaces are most likely to be contaminated, and should be cleaned and disinfected, at least twice during the day. At a minimum, at the end of each day, when visibly dirty and between cohorts. Examples of frequently touched surfaces include: door knobs, handles, locks, light switches, phones, desk surfaces, touch screen surfaces, faucets, sinks, and toilet handles. Disinfecting after cleaning will kill most germs. Cleaners and disinfectant products already used by schools are effective against COVID-19.

See these resources about cleaning and disinfection:

Cohorting

What is a cohort and how will they be used for the return to school?

Cohorting means that students are only in contact with their classmates and a single teacher/educator (their cohort) for as much of the school day as possible. Each cohort group should not mix with other cohort groups.

Does distancing between cohorts, or classes, need to be maintained if everyone is wearing a mask?

Yes. Distancing needs to be maintained.

What if there are teachers or other staff who need to move from one class to another?

Teachers should try to maintain physical distancing, wear a mask and practice good hand hygiene.

Will parents be allowed in schools?

Parents/guardians will only be provided with direct access to the school in the case of an emergency. Parents/guardians who enter the school for an urgent situation must do a screening questionnaire before entering, if possible. When entering the school, parents/guardians must wear a mask.

School staff will designate drop off and pick up locations for students by parents/guardians. Schools will determine and communicate a process by which a parent/guardian can reach the school office if necessary. This could include buzzing in to indicate they are there to pick up a child, texting if there is a school cell phone in the office, or other method.

Symptoms

What if students or staff develop symptoms of COVID-19 at school?

Any student or staff member who develops COVID-19 symptoms while in school should:

- be immediately separated from others, in a separate room where possible, until they are able to go home
- not take student or public transportation
- be supervised after they are isolated
- maintain physical distancing
- wear personal protective equipment that is consistent with health guidance

Students should be encouraged to tell someone if they feel unwell when at school.

What measures are in place to help with contact tracing if it is needed?

Schools must keep records of classes, seating charts, bus cohorts and daily visitors who are approved to enter the school. Contact tracing will vary depending on the specific situation.

[Contact tracing](#) (contact management) is conducted regularly and robustly by Public Health in our local communities. These measures, along with active and passive surveillance and outbreak management, will be deployed if needed to break the transmission chain.

What will happen if there is a person who is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 within the school?

Public health will be notified when there is a person who has COVID-19 within a school. Public health will perform routine follow up and will work closely with schools to undertake any contact tracing requirements. Public health will determine any steps required, including but not limited to, declaring an outbreak and closing classes and/or schools.

What reporting is done when a person is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19?

Schools must immediately report to the local public health unit when a person is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 within the school. Schools must provide any materials (for example, daily attendance and transportation records) to public health officials to support contact tracing and other activities in accordance with all applicable legislation, including the [Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#).

Public health officials will determine any additional steps required, including but not limited to the declaration of an outbreak and closure of classes and/or schools. Every day school boards must report when a person is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 within the school community to the ministry.

Principals must:

- communicate about the status of persons who have COVID-19 in their schools in keeping with ministry guidance and relevant privacy legislation.
- maintain a dedicated contact in the local public health unit and a list of the locations of the closest COVID-19 assessment sites.

What happens if one child in a classroom gets sick or is suspected to have contracted COVID-19?

Any student or staff member who becomes ill while at school will be separated immediately from others, ideally in a separate room, until they are able to go home. Household contacts (e.g. family who live with the ill individual) and non-household contacts (e.g., classmates) are no longer required to self-isolate if they are asymptomatic, unless otherwise directed by public health.

Schools are required to report when a person is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 to public health. Public health will determine any additional steps required such as declaring an outbreak or closure of classes and/or schools.

Other COVID-19 Changes

How can students ride the school bus safely?

School systems can implement a number of strategies to reduce the risk of transmission on buses:

- Drivers should practice all safety actions and protocols as indicated for other school staff (e.g., hand hygiene, cloth face coverings). Similar to frequently touched surfaces, buses should be cleaned and disinfected at least daily.
- Students who live in the same household may sit together if needed. Schools may consider alternative strategies to accommodate the reduced number of students in buses, such as staggered pick up and drop off times or additional bus routes.
- Schools should consider having spare, clean cloth face coverings available to ensure all students wear cloth face coverings on the school bus.
- When possible, drivers should open bus windows to increase circulation of outdoor air
- During dismissal, schools may provide physical guides, such as signs and tape on the sidewalk, to ensure that students and school staff remain at least 6 feet apart while waiting for transportation.

For more information, visit the [Student Transportation Service Consortium of Grey Bruce](#).

Will Student Nutrition Programs be allowed to continue to operate?

Student nutrition programs can continue to operate. All existing safe food handling practices and hand hygiene practices should be followed. All bins and containers for food must be disinfected prior to and after use. “Grab (individually portioned and packaged) and Go” format is preferred. Developing a traffic flow pattern, and off-setting groups with times will help avoid congestion.

Will special food days like pizza day and the milk programs be operating?

No, these programs will not be running until further notice. Try to provide snacks and meals that include all 3 food groups: fruit and vegetables, whole grain foods, and

protein foods including milk and alternatives. See [Canada's Food Guide](#) for examples of foods that fit into these categories.

Can playground and play structures be used safely?

Playground equipment remains closed until further notice. This determination will be reviewed as the year progresses.

What if my child is anxious about returning to school?

This is a stressful time for everyone. It is important to maintain open and honest communication channels with your children.

- Have regular conversations with your child. Explain that there will be changes to school routines because of COVID-19.
- Explain we can limit the spread of germs by wearing a face covering, avoiding touching eyes, nose or mouth, and sneezing and coughing into a tissue or elbow/sleeve
- Teach your child how to wash hands properly. Learn handwashing together by watching videos geared to your child's developmental age.
- Help your child get used to wearing a face covering.
- Ask your child what questions or worries they have and respond as best you can.

Helpful links for supporting your child's mental health:

COVID-19: Resources to build our children's resilience - Psychology Foundation of Canada includes webinars, pod casts, tip sheets, and more for parents, educators and child-caring professionals to support children and youth during COVID-19.

Talking to Your Anxious Child About COVID -19 - Children's Mental Health Ontario

How to Work with Your School to Support Your Child's Mental Health - School Mental Health Ontario

Additional Resources:

Government of Ontario [COVID-19 school screening](#)

Government of Ontario [Operational Guidance: COVID Management in Schools](#)

Ontario Ministry of Health [School reopening Guidance](#)

Bluewater District School Board https://www.bwdsb.on.ca/Parents/Return_to_School

Bruce Grey Catholic School Board <https://www.bgcdsb.org/>

Centre for Disease Control [FAQ for School Administrators on Reopening Schools](#)

Grey Bruce Health Unit - [COVID -19 resources](#)

Kingston Frontenac Leeds Addington Public Health - [School reopening Q &A document](#)

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit - [Return to School information for Families](#)

Ministry of Education - [Before and After School Programs Kindergarten – Grade 6](#)

Ministry of Education - [Operational Guidance During COVID-19 Outbreak](#)