



September 28, 2021

## GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) has developed [recommendations for schools](#) that build upon Provincial guidance, protocols, and protective strategies as they relate to COVID-19 in school settings. As per the Ministry of Education's [Health, Safety, and Operational guidance for schools](#), community use of schools is permitted provided activities are aligned with public health guidance and direction, including provincial requirements under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#). With respect to the use of schools outside of the school's operational hours, OPH recommends that only community groups that commit to complying with the applicable provincial requirements under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#) be considered by School Boards for community use.

Keeping COVID-19 transmission low in the community is important to reduce the introduction of the virus into schools. School Boards are asked to consider the following mitigation measures, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 introduction and spread in both the school community and the community group using the facilities.

### Clear and direct entry

OPH recommends measures to prevent interactions between staff/students attending the school and the community group using the facilities. For example, community use of school facilities could be limited to outside of school operating hours. If community use occurs during operating hours, dedicated separate entrance(s) and washroom facilities should be considered. OPH further recommends limiting access to areas within the school not intended for community use.

### Screening

Any visitors entering a school are required to self-screen for COVID-19 and stay home if they have any symptoms. Screening can be completed by using OPH's [online screening tools](#), available in multiple languages. Individuals who do not pass the screening process must not be allowed entry to the school and should follow instructions provided by the screening tool.

### Hand hygiene

Appropriate hand hygiene using an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water are amongst the most important protective strategies. Hand hygiene should be conducted by anyone entering the school, and incorporated into activity schedules.

For more information and for available resources, please visit our [website](#).

## **Masks**

Wearing a mask helps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Per Ministry of Education guidance on community use of schools, any visitors to a school are required to wear a mask while on school premises.

Masks are highly recommended for indoor sports, and masking is encouraged for outdoor sports when physical distancing cannot be maintained. OPH recommends that high-intensity sport and fitness activities, where masking may be difficult to maintain, take place outdoors.

Masks may be temporarily removed indoors if consuming food or drink and able to maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from every other person while in the indoor area.

It is important to note that a faceshield is not a substitute for wearing a face mask, as it does not filter respiratory droplets (which are produced by breathing and talking). All visitors and/or organization(s) should refer to the respective School Board and the [Reopening Ontario Act](#) for more information regarding mask policies. For more information regarding masks locally, please visit our [website](#).

## **Distancing**

OPH recommends [physical distancing](#) by encouraging all visitors to maintain a distance of at least two metres (six feet) from others and follow the capacity limits as per the current Provincial requirements outlined in the [Reopening Ontario Act](#). In addition, School Boards should ensure that [signage](#) to remind everyone about physical distancing and wearing a mask, is available and visible to the public.

## **Visitor sign-in and log**

As per Ministry of Education guidance, schools and community groups should collaborate to ensure that visitor lists and a log of the areas used are obtained, maintained, and readily available to be provided to OPH for contact tracing purposes in the event of potential exposure to COVID-19.

## **Cleaning and disinfection**

School boards should ensure there is an adequate program for cleaning and disinfecting schools, including frequency and schedule of cleaning, as well as areas to clean or disinfect depending on spaces utilized by community groups outside of the school's operational hours. OPH recommends cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces often (e.g. buzzer systems/kiosks, doorknobs, hand railings, light switches, elevator buttons, etc.) at a minimum of twice a day or more often as they become visibly soiled. Individuals engaging in community use of schools should adhere to each school board's cleaning program and uphold the responsibilities outlined by the program. In addition, OPH encourages school boards to implement a process to verify responsibilities have been met post community use. For more information regarding cleaning protocols, please refer to Public Health Ontario's [environmental cleaning fact](#)

[sheet](#). Health Canada has also provided a list of approved [hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers](#).

### **COVID-19 vaccination**

Achieving high rates of immunization in schools through COVID-19 vaccination is a part of a multilayer approach that can help prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 in schools, and supports our goals of keeping schools open and as safe as possible. The Ontario government has announced that COVID-19 vaccination policies will be mandatory in certain settings, including schools. As such, visitors and/or organization(s) seeking community use of schools should refer to the respective School Board for more information regarding this policy and instructions regarding its implementation.

### **For more information**

The above mitigation measures aim to provide guidance and reduce risks associated with the transmission of COVID-19 with respect to community use of schools. OPH will continually assess the impact of COVID-19 on the school community, and aims to ensure safety for all students, staff, partners, and visitors in the community.

For the more information regarding COVID-19 prevention strategies, please visit [our website](#) or connect with a Public Health Nurse by calling 613-580-6744, from Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.

Thank you for your support,  
Ottawa Public Health