

Ottawa Public Health Recommendations for Additional COVID-19 Protective Measures in School Settings – for release

October 12, 2021

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) has developed recommendations for additional COVID-19 protective measures for school settings for the 2021-2022 return to school. These recommendations build upon those developed by the Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health (COMOH) School Working Group. The recommendations endeavor to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission within the school setting while reducing interruptions to in-person learning as much as possible. OPH is monitoring and is concerned by the current local incidence of COVID-19, particularly given the prevalence of the Delta variant of concern. As such, OPH is recommending a cautious approach as we enter the upcoming school year and will continue to assess the need for these and other protective measures as the year progresses.

OPH recognizes that in addition to widespread uptake of COVID-19 vaccination, the best way to keep schools open and students in class is to minimize the introduction and spread of COVID-19 within the school setting. Reducing interactions between cohorts is expected to minimize the risk of COVID-19 spread between cohorts and reduce the number of individuals who must self-isolate at home as high-risk contacts. In addition, masking and physical distancing between individuals continue to play important roles in reducing the risk of transmission. As much as possible, these recommendations allow for resumption of activities while minimizing the risk of transmission between and within cohorts.

Where there is a difference between this guidance document and a school board’s internal policies and procedures, the school board’s plan should take precedence.

Student Masking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students in junior and senior kindergarten are strongly recommended to wear masks in indoor spaces at school and on school vehicles.• Students in Grades 1 to 12 are required to wear masks indoors and on school vehicles.
Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Masking for all students is required outdoors if physical distancing (2m) is not maintained <i>within</i> cohorts and/or <i>between</i> cohorts, including outdoor sports where masks can safely be worn.• Active screening is required daily for students, staff, and visitors (i.e., Completion of Ottawa Public Health’s School screening tool).• Confirmation of screening is recommended during periods of potential higher transmission, such as during periods of increased community transmission and following school breaks that tend to be associated with travel (e.g., after October and December holidays).

Recess/Breaks Outdoors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical distancing (2m) is required <i>between</i> cohorts at recess/during breaks outdoors. • Masking for all students is required outdoors if physical distancing is not maintained <i>within</i> cohorts and/or <i>between</i> cohorts, including outdoor sports where masks can safely be worn. • Students can be permitted to use playground structures without the need for disinfection or cleaning between uses. • Hand hygiene should be practiced before and after using playground equipment.
Shared Indoor Spaces (e.g., libraries, gymnasiums)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared indoor spaces can only be used by one cohort at a time as much as possible. • Physical distancing (2m) is required <i>between</i> cohorts if more than one cohort is using a shared space at the same time.
Cafeteria/Lunch	<p><u>Eating Outdoors:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical distancing (2m) is required <i>between</i> cohorts while eating outdoors. <p><u>Eating Indoors:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohorts must remain in the classroom to eat lunch as much as possible. • If a cafeteria setting is used, cohorts should be staggered with only one cohort using the space at a time. • Physical distancing (2m) is required <i>between</i> cohorts if more than one cohort is using the shared space at the same time.
Assemblies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor assemblies are not recommended at this time. This will be reassessed once local case counts have a sustained decline.
Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/guardians should drop off and pick up their children in a designated outdoor location (supervised, where applicable) and should not accompany children to their classroom. • Non-essential visitors to the school should be discouraged. • School nutrition program volunteers are considered essential visitors.
Music	<p><u>Singing:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Singing indoors is permitted within a cohort. Masks should be required while singing, and physical distancing maintained between individuals. • Singing outdoors is permitted with distancing maintained between cohorts. Masks should be required if distancing is not maintained between individuals within a cohort.

	<p><u>Wind Instruments:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of wind instruments should not be permitted indoors at this time. This will be reassessed once local case counts have a sustained decline. • The use of wind instruments <u>outdoors</u> is permitted with distancing maintained between cohorts.
<p>Physical Education, including inter-school sports activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masking should be maintained when using the gymnasium, pool, change rooms, weight rooms, indoor physical education equipment and shared outdoor equipment, except upon entering a swimming pool. • The use of school pools is permitted. Physical distancing (2m) should be maintained <i>between and within</i> cohorts while using pools and surrounding areas. • Masks must be worn for indoor sports. Masking is encouraged for outdoors sports when physical distancing cannot be maintained. • Attendance records should be maintained.
<p>Inter-provincial field trips</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OPH strongly recommends that only fully vaccinated students and staff participate in inter-provincial field trips (e.g., sports and music competitions).