

Restart January 2022 – Questions & Answers January 4, 2022

Why is the return to school delayed by a full week?

- Return to school for students in K-12 is delayed to provide public health and BC schools additional time to learn more about the potential impacts of the Omicron variant on communities and schools, and to implement enhanced safety plans to support the safe continuation of in-class learning.
- Students will return to in class learning on January 10, while staff returned on January 4. This additional time for assessment and planning will allow teachers, staff and Principals and Vice Principals to implement the updated safety guidelines and plan for potential interruptions in learning, including functional school closures due to the spread of the Omicron variant in the community.

What is defined as an Essential Worker? Can my child come to school?

- Schools play an important role in supporting students and families. Districts have been asked to prioritize supports for children of health care workers, students with disabilities and diverse abilities, and the children of other essential workers, including teachers and school staff, as their capacity allows. Parents should contact their school principal if their child meets any of the above criteria
- Child cares in schools will continue to operate as usual.

What is a functional school closures?

- Functional closure of a school, which is determined by the school or school district due to a lack of staff to provide the required level of teaching, supervision, support, and/or custodial to ensure the health and safety of students. This would likely be due to a high absenteeism of all staff or certain employees required for a school to function and the inability to replace those absences.

What enhanced safety measures are schools expected to have in place for January?

1. *Among the enhanced safety measures, K-12 public and independent schools must:*
 - Implement strategies that prevent crowding during class transition times.
 - o For example, different entrance and exit doors and times, stagger start/stop times and recess/lunch breaks.
 - Hold school gatherings and events (e.g., assemblies, etc.) virtually.
 - Hold staff-only gatherings (e.g., meetings, professional development activities) virtually.
 - Limit visitors to those who are supporting activities that directly benefit student learning and well-being (e.g., teacher candidates, immunizers, meal program volunteers, etc.)
 - Pause extracurricular sports tournaments (consistent with the December PHO Order).
2. *K-12 schools must also reinforce existing safety measures, including:*
 - Using all available space to maximize space between people.
 - o For example, different common space, classroom, and learning environment configurations (e.g., different desk and table formations).
 - Everyone able to wears a mask.
 - Doing daily health checks, and staying home when sick.

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

- Everyone eligible getting fully vaccinated, doing a daily health check, and staying home when sick.
- Using available space to spread out, and to respect other's personal space.
- Wearing masks in accordance with the Provincial Health Officer Order on Face Coverings.
- Cleaning hands regularly.
- Cleaning and disinfecting at least once a day.

Will there be any change to public notifications of school exposures or outbreaks?

- The Ministry of Education is actively working with the Ministry of Health, local medical health officers and BCCDC to determine the process needed to communicate exposure risk. The current procedures must be updated in response to the different characteristics of the Omicron variant. Updated information will be communicated to schools and districts in the coming weeks.

Will there be online learning because of COVID cases or absenteeism?

- The phased restart of school will give schools the time to develop contingency plans, including continuity of learning, in the event of functional closures in schools.

Will N95 masks be provided for teachers/staff/students?

- No, mask wearing will continue to be required for everyone inside schools.
- Schools will continue to provide non-medical masks for those who don't have their own masks, as has been the case throughout the pandemic.
- Any changes in a mask policy will be communicated by the Ministry of Health and the Provincial Health Officer.

What is district doing to address concerns related to ventilation in schools?

- The Ministry has retained an HVAC expert and established a Ventilation Technical Advisory Panel to provide ongoing advice on ventilation in schools.

Do the new rules prevent parents from entering schools?

- Schools will be limiting visitors to those that are offering services that are of direct benefit to students, like those helping with meal programs or teacher candidates.
- Schools will work with their parent community to ensure activities like drop off and pick up continue to occur safely, and that virtual options are provided when parents need to connect with their child's school (like for parent-teacher interviews).

Will buses be transporting students during the week of January 4th?

- No buses will not be running for the remainder of the week starting January 5th. Regular bussing will resume January 10th.