

Limiting the Spread of COVID-19 in Schools

We understand that there is some anxiety about returning to in-person learning, and people have questions. The reality is that given the level of COVID-19 activity in our province, people can be exposed to the virus any time they are out and around people. The province-wide public health restrictions are in place to help slow the spread of COVID-19 to protect our healthcare system, protect those most at risk of getting severely ill or becoming hospitalized and to allow children and youth to return to in-person learning.

Schools play a critical role in the wellbeing of children and youth and keeping schools open is a priority. Given that the Omicron variant is leading to mostly mild illness in children, we believe the benefits of students being in classrooms with their peers, far outweighs the risks. We've also sought input from experts and the [Nova Scotia Pediatric Provincial Advisory Group](#) also supports school reopening.

Are schools safe?

We can't equate safety with being COVID-free in schools or anywhere in our province right now. COVID-19 is in our communities provincewide, and that means it's also in our schools. The goal is to manage risks and limit the spread of COVID-19.

School settings are considered to be lower risk because of the protection provided by enhanced public health measures in schools compared to household and community settings. Students and staff also have access to home tests and while the tests should mainly be used when a person develops symptoms, they can test up to twice weekly if they choose to do so.

The [enhanced measures](#) include

- [vaccination](#)
- [daily screening](#)
- staying home when you are sick
- more access to [rapid test \(Test to Protect\) kits](#)

- grouping students in consistent cohorts
- wearing [masks](#)
- increased cleaning
- increased supports for ventilation

These are the tools needed to address COVID-19 exposures in school settings at this time. These enhanced measures and the province-wide public health restrictions currently in place will help keep children and youth learning in the classroom with their friends and peers.

Why has contact tracing stopped in schools?

COVID-19 is all around us and the risk of being exposed is the same, whether or not you receive an exposure notification. We should assume we have been exposed any time we are out and around other people and diligently monitor our own health.

COVID is in our community so it will be in our schools. The difference is that schools have enhanced public health measures in place for an added layer of protection. That's why school settings are considered lower risk compared to household and community gatherings (friend groups, sports, etc.).

If the only interaction with a person with COVID-19 is in a school setting (e.g., no close contact in a household or community), continue to follow enhanced public health measures for schools. This includes monitoring for symptoms, staying home when sick, and testing as appropriate. The staff or student may choose to test up to twice weekly, even without symptoms.

While it is not required, individuals or families of children who believe they had a significant close interaction in a school setting may choose to follow close contact guidance available at: <https://www.nshealth.ca/information-covid-19-close-contacts>.

What if I want to report that I, or my child, has tested positive for COVID-19?

Public Health continues to ask Nova Scotians to [report](#) positive rapid test results and to notify [close contacts](#) in their household and community settings (e.g. sports or arts groups, social contacts such as a birthday party).

If parents wish to share their child's COVID-19 status, or teachers wish to share their status with their colleagues or parents of their students, they can. Individuals are responsible for their personal health information.

Given that schools have enhanced protection measures in place, formal notifications about COVID-19 exposures at school will not be issued. The risk of contracting the virus at school and the actions you would then take are the same, whether you receive an exposure notification or not. Monitor your health, stay home if you're sick and test.

In schools, parents and teachers are asked to follow established procedures to report an absence.

What can I do to help myself or my family be prepared for COVID-19 exposures?

- Get [vaccinated](#) if you are eligible, including a booster dose
- [Stay home](#) if you have any new cold or flu symptoms or if feeling unwell
- Know when and how to isolate and use [Test to Protect kits](#)
- Wear a mask, keep your hands clean, and limit contact with others
- Follow COVID-19 guidance:
 - <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus>
 - <https://www.nshealth.ca/coronavirus>
- Learn what the Nova Scotia Provincial Pediatric Advisory Group says about [how to prepare](#) in case your child or family members get COVID-19

What should I know about vaccination?

- All eligible Nova Scotians are strongly encouraged to become fully vaccinated as soon as possible and schedule booster doses when they become eligible
- Vaccination doesn't prevent all COVID-19 infections, but help decrease spread and provide very good protection against severe disease
- One dose of vaccine provides some protection but getting all your doses is better. Having at least 8 weeks between the first and second dose provides the strongest long-term protection.

What do I do if I or my child is a close contact?

You need to follow [public health direction for people who are close contacts](#).

What do I do if I or my child tests positive for COVID-19?

You need to follow [public health direction for people who test positive](#).

What if I or my child has recently recovered from COVID-19?

In the 90 days after recovery from COVID-19, you are not required to isolate even if you are a close contact. However, if you have symptoms, please stay home until the symptoms have resolved or are improving because you are sick with something (like a cold or flu) and should avoid spreading it to others. Public Health does not recommend testing in the 90 days after recovery. You can choose not to get rapid tests from the Test to Protect program.