

# **COVID-19 FAQ**

## **For Education Sector**

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## GENERAL

### Using this Document

**Q: If changes are made to this FAQ document, will these be highlighted to alert the reader to a recent change?**

**A:** This document has been updated to include sub-topics. A page at the beginning of the document will highlight changes. Helpful hint: If searching for a specific keyword, use Ctrl + F to search the document for your topic of interest.

### Information for Parents

**Q: Is there information that can be given to students to take home to parents from the health unit or is it up to the school to provide information?**

**A:** Hastings Prince Edward Public Health has a plethora of COVID-19 information on our website: <https://hpepublichealth.ca/>. Schools can access our website to obtain fact sheets and information to provide to parents who do not have access to the internet.

## PROTECTIVE STRATEGIES

### Screening

**Q: Where can I find the new online COVID-19 school screening tool?**

**A:** <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>

**Q: Will every student have to complete screening daily before entering a school building?**

**A:** Yes, parents/guardians will perform daily screening of their child(ren) for COVID-19 symptoms BEFORE leaving for school using a self-assessment checklist.

**Q: When should students who take the school bus be screened?**

**A:** Parents/guardians will be expected to screen children prior to getting on the school bus.

### Student Mask Use

**Q: If a student has a medical exemption for not wearing a mask, do they have to provide proof?**

**A:** Proof is not required. However, speak to your principal. Principals should document this information. See below for reasonable exemptions to masking.

**Q: What can school staff do if a child refuses to wear a face mask?**

**A:** We encourage friendly reminders when a student is not wearing their mask; however, schools will impose disciplinary measures as per normal protocols for students refusing to comply.

### Mask Exemptions

**Q: What are the reasonable exemptions on the requirements to wear masks?**

**A:** Reasonable exemptions include:

- respiratory conditions that interfere with a person's ability to breath while wearing a mask such as severe asthma
- if a person is not able to remove a mask on their own, if required
- anxiety and behavioral 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

### Cleaning and Storage of Masks

**Q: What is the proper way to store a mask?**

**A:** Masks should be stored in a clean place (for example, a closed paper bag or container with a lid) and washed after every day of use, or if visibly soiled or damp.

[https://hpepublichealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/COVID19\\_Use-of-Face-Coverings-in-Schools.pdf](https://hpepublichealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/COVID19_Use-of-Face-Coverings-in-Schools.pdf)

### Removal of Masks

**Q: Do masks have to be worn outside?**

**A:** At this time, students are not required to wear masks outdoors. School staff are required to wear medical masks (surgical/procedural) outdoors if two metres of distance from others cannot be maintained (eye protection is also required if a staff member comes within two metres of an unmasked individual both indoors and outdoors).

**Q: Do masks need to be worn indoors during sports and physical education?**

**A:** At this time, masks must be worn during high-contact and/or high-intensity physical activities indoors with distancing encouraged. For low contact/low intensity activities, masking and distancing is encouraged where masks can be worn safely.

### Use of Own Masks

**Q: Can students use masks that pull up over the nose from around the neck (i.e. “neck gaiter”), rather than cloth masks?**

**A:** Students can wear any form of face covering that covers the mouth, nose, and chin.

[https://hpepublichealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/COVID19\\_Use-of-Face-Coverings-in-Schools.pdf](https://hpepublichealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/COVID19_Use-of-Face-Coverings-in-Schools.pdf)

## Staff Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – Eye Protection

### Q: When do staff have to wear eye protection with their mask?

A: Staff must wear eye protection (face shield, or goggles, or some, but not all safety glasses) if they are working within 2 m (6 ft) of anyone who is not wearing a mask (e.g. students in kindergarten, student with a mask exemption, staff with mask exemption, outdoors with unmasked individual).

## Ventilation

### Q: What are the recommendations for air ventilation and/or filtration in schools?

A: Please refer to the Ministry of Ontario's [COVID-19 Health, safety and operational guidance for schools \(2021-2022\)](#) for recommendations.

### Q: For HEPA filter units, are there recommendations on the CFM a unit should be able to handle?

A: The guidance advises that these units must be sized for the area that is being used and that in larger areas more than one HEPA unit may be required.

- A general approach and discussion of the utility of portable air cleaners, as well as factors to consider when placing the portable unit(s) within a space, are provided in the PHO document, [Use of Portable Air Cleaners and Transmission of COVID-19](#)
- Portable cleaners have varying capacities to filter the air; in addition, every room where they are used will have a different size (volume of space). For a given target of room air volumes to be filtered, air cleaner capacity (often in terms of clean air delivery rate or CADR, measured in cubic feet per minute or CFM) will need to be adequate for the room size. Most portable air cleaner packaging will indicate the largest size area or room it should be used in
- This [resource](#) and the associated online [tool](#) from the Harvard School of Public Health is an example which walks through the process of calculating the CFM of air a unit should handle for a given space
- Selection, care and use of portable air cleaners may require consultation with an experienced/knowledgeable HVAC professional

## SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING

### Physical Distancing

### Q: Is physical distancing still required if masks are used and additional safety measures are in place?

A: Yes, as much physical distancing as possible between students, between students and staff and between staff members should always be promoted.

**Q: What is meant by “as much distancing as possible”?**

**A:** At public health we continue to advocate maintaining physical distance where possible. Two metres represents the Canadian standard to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission. It is recognized that this is not always operationally possible and other measures are provided such as: masking, screening for symptoms before attending school, handwashing, respiratory etiquette and cohorting to limit the risk of transmission within a school community. While 2 metres distance may be difficult to ensure, the use of as much distance as possible will reduce the risk of transmission in proportion to that distance. We recommend a balance of providing for as much distance as possible while allowing necessary operations in the school.

**Q: When outside, is it acceptable for students to mix between cohorts?**

**A:** At this time, students do not need to stay within their cohorts during recess and breaks outdoors. In case of outbreak or high levels of community transmission, further control measures may be introduced in order to minimize disruption in the schools such as maintaining cohorts outside.

**Q: Are we continuing to provide a washroom schedule for cohorts?**

**A:** Based on the guidance, ‘periods of student movement should be staggered, if possible, to limit student congregation in the hallways’, it is recommended and encouraged that a washroom schedule is established.

### Use of Shared Spaces

**Q: How do we safely use shared spaces (e.g. classroom and then before/after program, gym, library, cafeteria)?**

**A:** Promote physical distancing as much as possible. Keeping a 2-metre distance from others helps to reduce the spread of illness. In shared spaces, maintain at least 2m distance between cohorts. Layering of multiple mitigation measures in these circumstances strengthens the risk mitigation potential overall.

Reinforce general 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.

Stagger flow of students in common areas including hallways, entrances/foyers if possible (e.g. with entry and exit procedures such as maximizing all entrances, creating designated routes to classrooms for students) and use visual cues to encourage physical distancing (e.g. accessible signage, floor markings).

Hand sanitizer should be available at school entrances and exits and in classrooms.

### Gatherings

**Q: Are school assemblies or other student/school gatherings permitted?**

- A:** School assemblies or other student/school gatherings are permitted and should follow the relevant provincial requirements under the [Reopening Ontario Act](#). As always, follow your school board direction and policies in addition to this guidance.
- Back-to-School BBQs, mixed events with community/parents, etc.
    - Follow provincial requirements under [Reopening Ontario Act](#) for Gatherings
  - Staff Meetings - consider virtual or outdoor or if held in-person, use whichever is less of capacity limits below:
    - Number of people based on physical distancing of 2 metres between individuals (take square metres of room and divide by 4); OR
    - 50% capacity of room based on fire code capacity
  - Assemblies (required for school operations) - Follow provincial requirements under [Reopening Ontario Act](#) for events and use whichever is less of capacity limits below:
    - Number of people based on physical distancing of 2 metres between individuals (take square metres of room and divide by 4); OR
    - 50% capacity of room based on fire code capacity

## CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

### Classroom

**Q: What kind of cleaning is required after an ill student/staff member has been removed from the classroom and isolation room?**

**A:** Surfaces touched or within 2 metres of the ill student/staff should be cleaned and disinfected.

**Q: What is the required frequency of cleaning and disinfecting shared equipment (i.e. art supplies, recess toys, sports equipment, shop tools, books, tablets). How should the shared equipment be properly cleaned and disinfected?**

**A:** Shared materials are permitted. The focus should be on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette to reduce the risk of infection related to shared equipment, particularly when regular cleaning of shared objects is not feasible. Routine cleaning only is advised.

## SHARED ITEMS, SPACES, AND PROGRAMMING

### Students

**Q: Can students use lockers, coat hooks, and/or cubbies?**

**A:** Yes. When different cohorts are interacting in shared indoor spaces, masking and as much physical distancing as possible should be maintained between cohorts. This may require student education, scheduled times, supervision or other appropriate measures that support physical distancing.



**Q: Can students bring personal items into the school?**

**A:** Personal belongings (e.g. backpack, pencil case, clothing, sun protection, water bottles, food, etc.) may be brought to school. Water bottles should be labelled.

**Q: After getting off the bus/arriving to school, can students play in the school yard prior to class?**

**A:** Yes, distancing should be encouraged between cohorts as much as possible. In case of outbreak or high levels of community transmission, further control measures may be introduced in order to minimize disruption in the schools (i.e. maintaining cohorts outside).

**Q: Are students permitted to eat off-campus?**

**A:** Yes, from a public health perspective, students may eat off-campus. However, this recommendation may change if local circumstances change and we see an increase in cases within our community.

**Q: Can students do group work?**

**A:** Yes, while desks must face forward as per guidance, students can be in groupings temporarily to facilitate learning.

## Music

**Q: Can wind instruments be used?**

**A:** At this time, wind instruments permitted indoors w/in cohort if minimum 2 m or more between individuals. Masks should be used by students and staff when not actively playing. As much distance as possible, use of large, well-ventilated spaces should be prioritized. Wind instruments permitted outdoors in mixed cohorts with distancing encouraged.

**Q: Can students sing indoors and outdoors?**

**A:** Yes, singing is permitted indoors with cohort as long as masking (as required) and physical distancing is in place. Singing is permitted outdoors with proper physical distancing and masking in place IF distance cannot be maintained.

## Sports

**Q: For sport practices and games, what is required from coaches in terms of screening and attendance tracking?**

**A:** Coaches must keep a record of all staff/students on the team. This list will be required if a positive case is identified: [Extracurricular Line List](#). Attendance must be tracked at each game and practice. This ensures we have contact information for the team and also who was actually in attendance if there is an exposure to a case. Advise coaches and students that they are required to self screen for COVID-19 symptoms prior to games and practices

- reiterate that this is mandatory and needs be announced at the beginning of every game/practice. Advise coaches to send home coaching staff and students that exhibit signs/symptoms of COVID-19.

**Q: If there is a case on a sports team, what are the protocols? What about if there has been a game played between schools?**

**A:** HPEPH are notified of all positive lab confirmed cases of COVID-19. However, if you are made aware of a case on one of the teams, please notify Hastings Prince Edward Public Health ([613\)966-5500](tel:6139665500) and we can make sure we have all the information required. If/when HPEPH is notified we will require the extracurricular line list and also attendance for all games and practices during the exposure period in order to conduct contact tracing.

**Q: What protocols are required of hosting schools for tournaments and exhibition play?**

**A:** In order to expedite contact tracing, we request that the hosting team completes the following line list: [Extracurricular Line List](#) and this list is kept with you in case a positive COVID infection is identified. You do not have to send this information to public health unless we ask for it.

**Q: Can bussing to games and competitions happen, given that most bus companies charter their school buses out for short trips and then send them directly to schools to do their afternoon runs?**

**A:** Yes - keep track of attendance on buses- as indicated above. Bus companies are responsible for cleaning as per provincial guidance.

### Placement Students

**Q: Can schools accept placement students?**

**A:** Yes, schools may accept placement students ensuring that appropriate measures are taken along with adherence to all guidance and public health precautions.

### Specialized Education Staff/Teachers and Programming

**Q: Are specialized education staff and teachers (for example, education assistants, French teachers) permitted to go from classroom to classroom, and work at more than one school? Can students involved in specialized programming be withdrawn from a class to join a group of students from different cohort(s) in an alternative location?**

**A:** Yes, both educators and students may move between classrooms, however, there should be an increased emphasis on all public health precautions including screening, attendance tracking, distancing, masking, and hand hygiene.

**Q: Can students in the life skills program from the same cohort resume cooking lessons?**

**A:** Yes, ensuring that all public health precautions are taken including screening, attendance tracking, distancing, masking, and hand hygiene.