

New Provincial COVID-19 Restrictions Questions and Answers for First Nations Schools

December 11, 2020

- The [Use of Face Coverings in Indoor Public Spaces \(COVID-19\) Order](#), issued by the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, requires individuals 12 years of age and older to wear a mask or face covering in designated indoor public spaces.
- The updated [Gathering and Events Order](#), issued by the Provincial Health Officer, suspends all social events and gatherings to significantly reduce COVID-19 transmission related to social interactions and travel.
- WorkSafeBC has updated their guidance for employers regarding [employee health checks](#).
- More information on province-wide restrictions is available [online](#).

INTRODUCTION

This question & answer document is intended to provide First Nation school administrators with information on the new orders and restrictions recently issued by the Provincial Health Officer and the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General and how they may impact BC First Nations schools. This document is an adaption by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) of a BC Ministry of Education resource. First Nations are advised to continue monitoring the latest directives from the [Office of the Provincial Health Officer](#), [BC Centre for Disease Control](#), and the [BC Ministry of Health](#).

FNESC and FNSA fully respect the authority of individual First Nations to make decisions about school operations in the best interests of their students, schools, and communities and that there may be requirements set out for public and non-First Nations independent schools that First Nations may determine do not apply to them. We also recognize that First Nations may have additional requirements and processes beyond what are described in this document.

IMPORTANT: The information within this resource is not legal advice and should not be interpreted as such. First Nations are encouraged to seek independent legal advice, as required, to address their particular circumstances and concerns.

MASKS

Does the new provincial order requiring face coverings in indoor public spaces apply to K-12 schools?

- The new [provincial order](#) is directed to public spaces rather than workplaces and does not specifically reference schools.
- However, existing guidelines, including the BC Ministry of Education's [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 \(p.24\)](#), advise staff in all K-12 schools and students in middle/secondary schools to wear masks in high traffic areas such as buses and in common areas such as hallways, or anytime outside of their learning group whenever physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- The new provincial order does apply to public spaces (indoor common areas) within office buildings, including school offices.

What are the mask requirements for administrative offices (e.g. school office)?

- Ministry of Education guidance refers to the need to follow [general WorkSafeBC guidance regarding COVID-19](#), as well as [Offices: Protocols for returning to operation](#), for office settings occupied by adults only.
- Current WorkSafeBC guidance for office settings advises the use of masks when physical distancing of two metres cannot be maintained and people cannot be separated by partitions or barriers.
- In addition to WorkSafeBC guidance, the new provincial order requires all persons over 12 years of age (including employees and visitors) to wear a mask while in public spaces within office buildings (e.g. reception areas, lobbies).¹
- For all other areas of shared indoor workplaces, the Provincial Health Officer strongly recommends that employees wear a mask when they are in the building and away from their personal workspace/office, including when in hallways, elevators, lunch/break rooms, kitchens, etc.
 - This recommendation applies regardless of the number of people in the room/space and the available space for physical distancing.
 - The mask can be removed when eating or drinking.
- Employees should also be wearing masks while working in a shared work area where there is less than two metres and there are no barriers between the workspaces.

What are the mask requirements for other buildings/sites (e.g. maintenance shops)?

While the current order on use of face coverings does not specifically reference these workplaces, the province-wide restrictions announced on November 19th require employers to [review their COVID-19 safety plan](#) to ensure robust health and safety protocols (including mask use, physical distancing, barriers and cleaning/disinfecting procedures) are in place for these sites. School safety plans should be in alignment with existing guidance from [WorkSafeBC](#) and the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#).

Is a face shield or mouth shield an adequate substitute for a non-medical mask?

- No, as they do not fully contain the nose and mouth.

Is physical distancing still required while wearing masks?

- Yes, physical distancing must continue to be practiced, even when masks are being worn. Masks are not an effective substitute for physical distancing.
- There must be no social gathering/congregating of employees in any areas.
- Virtual meetings between adults are strongly encouraged wherever possible.

HEALTH CHECKS

Have any changes been made to the daily health check requirements for employees, including those who work in schools?

- The Provincial Health Officer has reinforced the importance of daily health checks as part of employers' COVID-19 health and safety plans.
- The Provincial Health Officer's verbal order, issued on November 19th, includes a requirement for all employers to ensure that every employee conducts a daily health check prior to entering the workplace.
- The Provincial Health Officer's verbal order also requires health check processes be

¹ Exemptions to the provincial mask requirements apply to people who are unable to wear a mask due to a health condition or a physical, cognitive or mental impairment, and to people who are unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person.

“active” in that employees must confirm with their employer that they have reviewed the complete list of entry requirements and that none of the prohibited criteria apply to them.

- Employers can use a number of methods to confirm employees have completed a daily health check including in written, verbal, or online format.
- “Passive” processes such as only displaying a poster onsite do not meet the new health check requirements for employers.
- Employers are required to confirm that a health check was completed but should not be collecting any personal information about employees, including employee responses to health check questions.
- Employee responsibilities include:
 - Reviewing the list of symptoms and entry requirement questions in the employer’s health check.
 - Completing the daily health check and informing the employer that they have done so, using the health check method at their workplace.
 - Not entering the workplace if they do not meet any of the entry requirements listed on the health check.
- Active daily health check requirements only apply to employees. Students (and parents, on behalf of the student) are not required to complete active daily health checks under the new provincial order, but parents should continue to assess their children daily for symptoms of illness before sending them to school.²
- Detailed information on health check requirements, sample methods for employers, FAQs, and an entry check poster are available on the WorkSafeBC website (<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/health-and-safety/health-checks>).
- Additional information on illness and self-assessment policies and protocols are outlined in the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 \(p.19\)](#).

Do daily health checks have to be completed for contractors, trades people or visiting staff who are accessing the building?

- Yes

Do daily health checks have to be completed for visitors (e.g. volunteers, parents, teacher candidates)?

- Yes, as advised in the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 \(p.17\)](#), schools are responsible for ensuring that all visitors confirm they have completed the requirements of a daily health check before entering the building.

WORKING FROM HOME

Do the new provincial orders/restrictions change employer obligations regarding work from home arrangements?

- As part of the new [province-wide restrictions](#), the provision of work from home options is recommended where feasible but is not included as a requirement. As such, work from home options are at the employer’s discretion based on their respective safety plan; recognising that it is not mandatory to work from home.
- Current WorkSafeBC guidelines for office spaces state that, where possible, employers should consider remote work options for workers who do not require office attendance.

² For more information see page 19 of the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12](#).

SCHOOL PROGRAMS, EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND SPORTS

Can school-based programs (e.g. child care, school meal programs) continue to operate?

- Yes, these programs may still continue. Updates to the provincial Gathering and Events order are intended to preserve essential services such as education, child care, etc.
- All programs should continue to adhere to the health and safety guidelines outlined in the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12](#).

Can extracurricular activities and special interest clubs continue in schools?

- School-led extracurricular activities and clubs for students are not impacted by the new provincial orders. Extracurricular activities that continue should operate in accordance with the health and safety guidelines outlined in the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 \(p.37\)](#).

Can schools host a dinner, dance or other community event?

- No, all social events and gatherings are suspended by the new provincial order.

Are school sports still allowed?

- Yes, school sport activities (e.g. games, practices) may still proceed provided that:
 - There are no spectators, beyond the minimum staff/volunteers required to run the activity.
 - The sport activity only involves travel outside of the community or local area when necessary for the activity to take place (e.g. a learning group in a rural area needs to access a particular sports facility outside of their immediate community).
 - The sport activity does not involve inter-school competition.
 - The sport activity adheres to the health and safety guidance outlined in the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 \(Sports section, p.34\)](#), including minimizing physical contact within learning groups and maintaining physical distance (2M) between students from different learning groups.

FAITH-BASED SERVICES IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Are faith-based services allowed to continue in independent schools?

- Yes, faith-based services for students are allowed to continue in independent schools as they would be considered part of students' educational programs.
- However, all religious in-person gatherings and worship services for the broader community are currently suspended under the updated provincial order.

COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

Can schools and school districts continue to allow after hours use of school facilities? What types of community use of schools are allowed?

- In alignment with the updated [Gathering and Events Order](#), schools may continue to allow community use of school facilities after hours for the following activities:
 - Essential community services (e.g. immunization programs, food banks or meal programs for those in need, etc.).
 - Structured programs for children and youth (educational, music, art, drama, recreational, outdoor fitness or social activity) - no close contact, no spectators, must not exceed 50 people.
 - Structured sport for children and youth – delivered by a provincial or local sport organization, participants must maintain physical distance of three metres from one

- another, no spectators, must not exceed 50 people.
- Support group meetings - must not exceed 50 people.
- The activities outlined above must have an organizer and must also meet the following conditions:
 - there is a COVID-19 safety plan in place, which includes the collection and retention (for 30 days) of contact information for all participants.
 - access to the activity is controlled, and measures are put in place to maintain physical distancing of two metres (three metres for sports) between participants (unless they reside together);
 - measures are put in place to prevent the congregation of participants inside and outside of the facility;
 - if there is a leader/presenter/officiant/musician, there is a physical barrier or minimum three metres distance between them and the activity participants;
 - hand sanitization supplies are readily available;
 - if there is a self-serve food or drink station, there must be hand washing facilities or hand sanitizing supplies within reach, signage regarding hand hygiene and physical distancing, and frequent cleaning/sanitizing of self-serve utensils and high-touch surfaces at the station; and
 - adhere to additional health and safety protocols outlined in the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12](#) (p.18).