



February 5, 2021

## Re: Ministry of Education/Provincial Health Guidelines Update

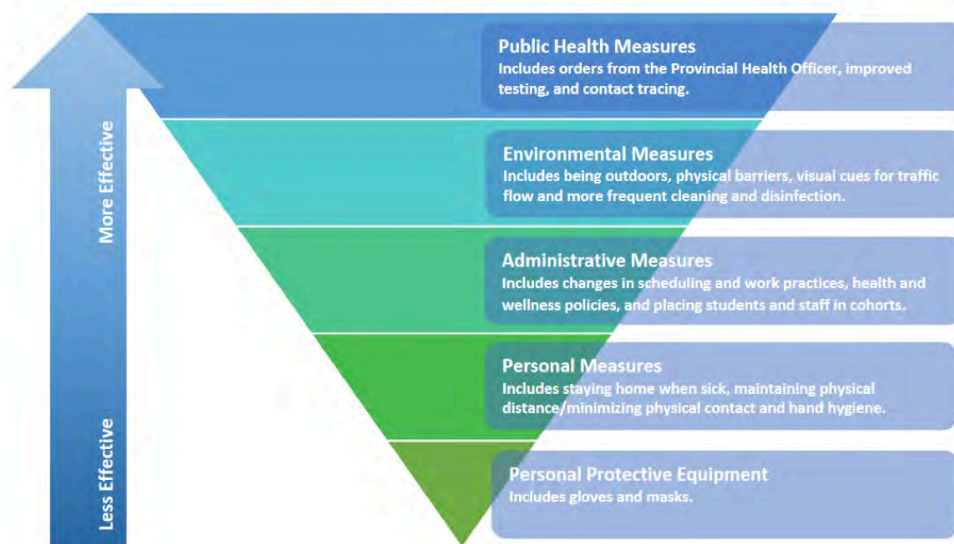
Dear Parents and Families,

Yesterday, the Minister of Education and Dr. Bonnie Henry shared updated COVID-19 health and safety guidelines for all public and independent schools in BC. We will begin implementing the new guidelines as soon as possible and also work on updating our school and district safety plans.

The Minister of Education, Deputy Minister and senior Public Health officials, clearly state:

- 1) We continue to do an **excellent job of keeping our schools safe** for all students and staff.
- 2) The **risk of transmission or exposure in schools remains low** because of our diligence and strong safety plans. Exposures in schools happen when there is community spread of the virus.
- 3) There are **lessons learned over the past six months** back to school that have caused some **areas of the PHO and Ministry guidelines to be revised and updated for implementation in all schools**.
- 4) The most important health protocols based on scientific evidence, remain those in upper and middle areas of the pyramid below.

The Hierarchy for Infection Prevention and Exposure Control Measures for Communicable Disease



As a result, we will remain diligent in encouraging hand washing, having students and staff stay home when ill through daily Health Checks, maintain physical distance whenever possible, continue our enhanced cleaning in schools and on busses, and implement the updated public health measures.

In the [Ministry news release](#), the Ministry states that wearing masks shall increase as follows:



*All middle and secondary students and K-12 staff will now be required to wear non-medical masks in all indoor areas, including when they are with their learning groups. The only exceptions are when:*

- *sitting or standing at their seat or workstation in a classroom;*
- *there is a barrier in place; or*
- *they are eating or drinking.*

*Prior to these changes, masks were required for middle and secondary students and all K-12 staff in high-traffic areas, like hallways and outside of classrooms or learning groups when they could not safely distance from others.*

*For elementary students, wearing masks indoors remain a personal choice. These updates are part of ongoing work of the provincial education steering committee and are in alignment with provincial health updates.*

Both the Minister of Education and Dr. Bonnie Henry stated clearly that although the update guidelines require masks in more situations for secondary students, ensuring a caring and safe learning environment for all is important. They reiterated that the approach in schools and on busses is not to be punitive, should students for a variety of reasons, not be able to tolerate masks.

Here are some useful links:

BCCDC guidance: [http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID\\_public\\_guidance/Guidance-k-12-schools.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID_public_guidance/Guidance-k-12-schools.pdf)

BC K-12 Education guidelines: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/k-12-covid-19-health-safety-guidlines.pdf>

BCCDC school site: <http://www.bccdc.ca/schools>

FAQs for Parents and Students: <http://www.bccdc.ca/schools/Documents/Parent-FAQs.pdf>

K-12 Daily Health Check app and tool: <https://www.k12dailycheck.gov.bc.ca/healthcheck?execution=e1s1>

More information in the coming days and weeks will be shared by your school principals and vice-principals and on our websites. As always, do not hesitate to reach out to your schools should you have questions or concerns.

With kindest regards to all,

Ms. Terry Taylor  
Superintendent of Schools