

Back-to-School Guide for Parents and Caregivers

September 15, 2020

Return to Class 2020

“In-class learning will resume on September 8th for students in all public and independent schools across the province.” – Manitoba Education

With the fast-evolving Coronavirus situation, the DSFM is preparing the return to class for September. First and foremost, the health and safety of our school communities remain paramount. We are working closely with Manitoba Education as well as the health authorities in order to make the best decisions possible to ensure a safe environment in each of our schools.

We hope this plan will answer your questions. Our goals are as follows:

- To propose an operating framework to our staff, to our communities and to our students.
- To ensure everyone’s health and safety.
- To provide a learning plan and a recovery learning plan for all students.

What will the return to school look like? On July 30th, Manitoba Education informed Manitobans that the school reopening plan is as follows:

In-class learning with public health measures in place.

What does this mean for students, parents, caregivers and the community?

- To provide our students with a full academic program.
- To provide school transportation to all eligible students.
- To meet the physical and mental needs of all students.
- To ensure each of our schools strictly follows hygiene practices recommended by the Public Health Officer.
- To minimize the risk of transmission as much as possible.
- To establish a daily physical-distancing and personal-hygiene routine for everyone in the school.
- Students Grades 4 to 12 must wear a mask at school when two (2) meters of physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Students Kindergarten to Grade 12 must wear a mask in the school bus.

Here are some important points to remember:

- To maximize the number of students per classroom, cohorts* (designated groups of students) are recommended, meaning that students will require one (1) metre of physical distancing from one another in the classroom.
- When students are no longer in cohorts, two (2) meters of physical distancing is required.
- Students K-8 will enter in cohorts and will stand in line while maintaining one (1) metre of physical distancing.
- When in transition within the school, students will remain in cohorts and will require one (1) metre of physical distancing.

* Cohorts involve keeping groups of students together and avoiding other interactions with other groups.

School Day Structure

The school day structure will be as follows:

- Students Kindergarten to Grade 12 will be in class daily.
- A cohort system will be used to minimize contact.
- Larger classrooms will be used to accommodate larger groups.
- To avoid possible contamination by sharing supplies, each student K to 8 will have a personal bin containing educational supplies, provided by the DSFM.
- By preventative measure, lockers will not be used. Students will bring their personal school supplies in their school bag which will be placed under their desk.
- Since some of our schools are already at full capacity, we may need to use the specialists' rooms as classrooms. Students K-8 will continue to have access to a full academic program. In certain circumstances, we may need to use community space or, when possible, space in other DSFM schools in close proximity.
- School Principals will ensure, as much as possible, that cohorts enter and exit alternatively through different entrances. Floor markings will be in place to ensure students follow the physical distancing guideline.
- Each school will have a schedule to facilitate travel within the school during recess and lunch.
- Since school transportation will be affected by physical distancing guidelines, the DSFM may have to integrate different school start and end times to allow school buses to take on additional routes.

Recess and Lunch Breaks

Recess is important for students as it allows them to get fresh air and stretch their legs. Depending on the number of students in a school and the size of the school yard, recess times may be staggered.

The Province states the following:

“You will need to adjust the timetable to favour physical distancing (outdoor classes, frequent and staggered breaks to wash hands, staggered recess and lunch, physical-distancing measures in class and in the restroom.”

- Schools with neighbouring municipal parks, without fences, will allow more students outdoors at the same time, ensuring these students are within a defined zone (sub groups) and maintaining a maximum of 300 students.
- Students K-8 will have lunch in their classroom to limit close contacts and to avoid breaking cohorts.
- Students Grades 9 to 12 could have lunch in a designated room or outside of school. Students leaving the school during lunch must follow sanitary measures applicable to all Manitobans and will only be allowed to re-enter the school at the start of their afternoon class.
- Microwave use will not be permitted.
- Each school will ensure monitoring during lunch time.
- Health currently discourages the opening of school canteens. Please ensure your child brings a lunch.

Students Grades 9 to 12

The school day structure for Grades 9 to 12 will be more complex. We may need to use spaces in our secondary schools should we experience a lack of space in our elementary schools.

It is important for our students Grades 9 to 12 to have access to a schedule resembling, as close as possible, to the one previously known. Cohorts and consistent schedules will be used to cover core curriculum and required courses during the first semester.

Grade 9 cohort: 4/4 in-class instruction (this is an example, some schools will offer 5 courses)

Grade 10 cohort: 4/4 in-class instruction (this is an example)

Grade 11 cohort: 3/4 or 4/4 in-class instruction (this is an example)

Grade 12 cohort: 3/4 in-class instruction, 1 or 2 distance-learning in the PM (this is an example)

- Grades 9 and 10 will have in-class instruction in the AM and PM.
- Some Grade 11 students, depending on previously credited courses, will have a minimum of 3 courses out of 4 as in-class instruction, the 4th will be by distance-learning but could be held at school.
- Grade 12 students will have mandatory classes in the morning and possibly some distance-learning courses in the afternoon. This will allow Grade 12 students, able to transport themselves, to leave the school. For the other students requiring school transportation, study rooms will be made available.
- Although a number of students Grades 11 and 12 will have spares, we are currently trying to plan schedules to ensure these periods are in the afternoon in order to avoid students entering and exiting the school at any time. Students will stay at school if they cannot leave by their own means of transportation.

Student Services

- Students with special needs will be well supported. Personalized learning plans will be updated in September and individual interventions will be permitted.
- School Student Services and the Division's Student Services will ensure all educational tools are available to all teachers.
- We will ensure that students unable to attend school due to a health concern receive an education specific to his or her needs.
- If certain accommodations must be made to meet the needs of certain students, the DSFM will provide them.
- For students with health conditions, the DSFM will, with the help of local health authorities, implement necessary measures for a safe return. If not possible, these students will have access to distance education.
- PPE supplies will be available for staff members working closely with students requiring significant personal support. These students will also have access to PPE.

Please remember that Manitoba Education continues to work very closely with key players to provide the safest return-to-school possible. For more information, please visit <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/support/rsssn.html>.

Recovery Learning

We recognize that some students will arrive in September requiring additional linguistic support. With the help of Programming and Student Services, teachers will assess student needs in order to manage recovery and consolidated curricula. This will take place throughout the school year.

All teachers were required to include individualized comments in student report cards to reflect academic notions that were not learned or not taught.

- Based on these comments, teachers will ensure that students acquire necessary notions to continue their academic progress.
- School Student Services teams with the help of the Division specialists (Psychologist, Social Worker, Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, Resource Teacher) will provide appropriate support to students with special needs.
- For students unable to attend school due to health reasons, a teacher will be assigned to the student to ensure the curriculum continues by distance education.
- Depending on the health concern and the student's age, some will receive a laptop and others will receive printed material.
- Students are expected to fully participate in their education. Evaluation will be based on the work completed, whether by in-class instruction or by distance education.

Transportation

Guidelines for Transportation to Schools (Manitoba Education)

Wherever possible, alternative transportation to school is encouraged. Parents, caregivers and students may provide their own transportation, including carpooling, walking or cycling, to avoid possible virus exposure on the bus. Note that carpooling can also be a risk for transmission. For advice on how to minimize this risk, please visit www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/infomanitobans/transportation.html.

Where school bus transportation is necessary, the following guidelines should be followed by school bus drivers and students:

- Students with symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend school or be passengers on buses (see symptoms should not come to school nor board the school bus (see <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>).
- Drivers with symptoms of COVID-19 should not drive the school bus (see <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/>).
- All school bus passengers, as well as the driver, are required to wear a non-medical mask. These should be put on before getting on the bus and taken off after exiting the bus, if removal is appropriate for the setting. Students in lower grades may also wear non-medical masks (Guidelines on how to wear a mask can be found at www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/prepareandprevent/index.html).
- All passengers and drivers should perform hand hygiene before and after being on the bus.
- Where capacity allows, leave the seat immediately behind the driver unoccupied.
- When possible and as weather permits, open windows and/or roof vents to allow for increased ventilation.
- Assign seats so the same students are seated in the same seats every day for regular bus routes.
- Where possible, seat one student per seat on the school bus. Students from the same household can also sit together on one seat.
- Where one student /household per seat is not possible, seat students from the same in-school cohort on the same seat on the bus.
- Regardless of seating arrangement needs, ensure that up-to-date lists of bus riders and drivers are maintained to enable contact tracing if required.
- Students who require a companion to ride the bus may sit next to their companion (treated as if they were from the same household and/or in-school cohort).
- When unable to practice physical distancing while assisting students using mobility devices or child restraint systems, additional considerations may be necessary (see www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/reopening/supports_non_distance.html).
- As per routine protocols, students should remain seated in their own seats and should not move around the bus.
- Students may transfer from one bus to another to get to and from school. These students will be considered members of two bus cohorts.
- Children should maintain physical distancing (two meters is recommended) when lining up to get on the bus, and when exiting the bus.
- Bus pick-up and drop-off of students at the school should be staggered where possible, to avoid crowding at the school entrance.
- Whenever possible, buses should be loaded from back to front and unloaded from front to back; one student or household should stand up and exit at a time to minimize close contact between students.
- Ensure there is enhanced cleaning of seats and other high-touch surfaces (ex. windows, railings) before each new group of students attends the bus.
- Hard-surface disinfectants or cleaning agents may be transported on a bus providing the product is secured and not accessible to students (maximum of 1 litre).
- Subject to public health guidance and risk of COVID-19 transmission, additional measures for physical distancing may be required during the school year.

How can parents/caregivers help keep students and schools safe?

Screen for symptoms every morning

If your child has COVID-19 or flu-related symptoms, keep them at home. An up-to-date list of symptoms can be found at: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/about/index.html>.

Isolating and getting tested as soon as symptoms appear, as well as tracing and isolating contacts in a timely manner, is important for limiting the spread of the virus in the class/cohort, daycares, schools, and community.

Public Health will lead the response by contacting close contacts of the confirmed case and by communicating with those who may have been exposed once a case appears in the schools.

The Screening Tool could also help determine if your child should be tested for COVID-19. In such case, call Health Links at 204-788-8200 or 1-800-315-9257.

Physical Distancing

- Please ensure a physical distancing of two (2) meters from other students when dropping off or picking up your child at school.
- Avoid visiting the school. Please email or call the teacher or school administrator when you need to talk.
- Encourage your child to wear a mask, especially in common areas and when physical distancing is not possible.

Be prepared to talk about COVID-19

Provide reassurance to children and youth about their personal safety and health. Telling children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting. Reassure them about their safety and explain there are many things they can do to stay healthy.

For more information on talking to children about COVID-19, please visit:

UNICEF: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-covid-19-school-return>

World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/healthy-parenting/english-tip-6-covid-19-parenting.pdf?sfvrsn=232558c1_8

Students: What to expect?

Back to school will look different but your teachers and principals are excited to have you back. They are working hard to make sure schools are ready. Your school will help explain the changes. Here are some of them:

- When arriving at school, moving in the hallways and eating lunch, teachers and staff will be helping students spread out and remember to physically distance.
- The school staff will explain the meaning of a cohort, including the one which you will be part of (a cohort is a group of students who stay together, mostly for the classroom but can be increased to 75 for recess and other activities).
- When unable to maintain a physical distance of two (2) meters, all students Grades 4 to 12 must wear a mask.
- Students Kindergarten to Grade to 12 must wear a mask when on the school bus. Students must wash their hands before entering and after exiting the school bus.
- Students must keep the same seat throughout the pandemic.
- Students from a same cohort must keep the same chair and desk.
- School staff must wear a mask at school when unable to keep a physical distance of two (2) meters.
- The DSFM will provide parents and caregivers with the latest changes made by the Chief Public Health Officer.

Extracurricular Activities

Although physical-distancing guidelines will always be present, certain extracurricular activities will be possible if all guidelines can be followed. Some activities may be modified.

School Cleaning (restrooms and classrooms)

School Custodians will clean restrooms (minimum of six times daily) and classrooms, including all surfaces and taps. Stairs, door handles and water fountains will also be cleaned frequently.

Lockers

To avoid any transmission during scenario 2, lockers will not be in use. Students will bring their daily learning material to school.

Masks

Masks are now mandatory for students Grades 4 to 12 when unable to maintain a physical distancing of two (2) meters, as indicated by the Chief Public Health Officer. Staff and visitors must also wear a mask.

Public Health Measures

Provincial school divisions must follow public health recommendations. We must all be proactive to minimize the risk of transmission.

Self-Assessment

- Parents and caregivers will be expected to screen their child for COVID-19 symptoms before entering the school or the school bus.
- Staff members must also administer a self-assessment before leaving home.

<https://covid19.soinscommunsmb.ca/covid19/outil-de-depistage/> (français)
<https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/> (anglais)

Symptoms

- Students showing symptoms at school will be isolated (2 meters).
- Unless the child has a health concern associated with the use of a mask, the school will provide one.
- The school will immediately call the parents or caregivers to pick up their child. Parents or caregivers will also be asked to call Health Links at 204-788-8200 or 1-800-315-925 or to call their family doctor.
- If a student requires the presence of an adult while isolated, a staff member, who has washed their hands and is wearing a mask, will stay with the student.
- If the school is unable to reach the parents or caregivers of the child showing symptoms, the child will stay in isolation at school.
- The isolation room will be disinfected upon the child's departure.
- A child with COVID-19 symptoms will not be able to return to school until Public Health advises to do so. If the child receives a positive result for COVID-19, Public Health will provide the family and the school with the necessary information. Generally, follow-ups are done between 24 hours and 28 hours once received from the lab.
- If a staff member begins to show symptoms of COVID-19, he or she must self-isolate, inform their supervisor and return home.
- Staff members on sick leave or in isolation must follow the administration directives and the collective agreement. A doctor's note will not be required from staff with COVID-19, from staff having flu-like/cold symptoms nor from staff taking care of a close family member showing COVID-19 symptoms.

Hand Hygiene

- Students will be expected to clean their hands with a sanitizing gel upon entering the school bus and at the arrival and departure of the school (with supervision).
- All individuals in the school must clean their hands:
 - o before and after using the restroom
 - o before and after meals
 - o after sneezing or blowing their nose
 - o after wiping their nose
 - o when hands are dirty
 - o before preparing to eat
 - o before and after breaks or recess
 - o before entering a room, if the individual has moved within the school throughout the day

Outbreak or Possible Contact Tracing

- If one of our schools has a confirmed case, all parent communication will be taken over by Manitoba Public Health.
- Contact tracing will also be done by Public Health with the help of predetermined cohorts.
- Public Health may:
 - o contact students, families or staff member who may have been in close contact with a confirmed (or probable) case and advise the need to self-isolate or to self-monitor. Public Health could also determine when it is safe to return to school
 - o requisition documents, schedules, etc., identify cohorts, staff members and visitors who may have come into contact with the confirmed case
 - o offer to administer tests to contacts of the confirmed case
 - o determine if a partial or complete school closure is necessary
 - o Public Health will provide schools, which certain students may be affected, with communications to share with families, staff and students.

Miscellaneous

Visitors and Volunteers

- School Principals must manage the traffic in the school and strictly minimize school entry and exit. In this regard, communicating by phone or video is preferred.
- All visitors and volunteers must administer a self-assessment by using the Online Screening Tool prior to making an appointment. They must sanitize their hands and also wear a mask if meeting with a staff member. Physical-distancing guidelines will also apply throughout their school visit. Visitors and volunteers failing to comply will be denied entry.
- Schools must keep a visitor log.
- Individuals working closely with the schools (health and education) will be given priority: nurses, interns, lunch program volunteers, etc.
- Community use of schools will be suspended. This does not apply to the childcare centres.

Religious Instruction and Religious Exercises

In some of our schools, parents and caregivers have exercised their right, recognized by the school act, that their child may: either take part in religious instruction or take part in religious exercises. The DSFM recognizes this right and will attempt to maintain these exercises while physical-distancing. School Principals will verify the possible continuation of these exercises and will notify parents and caregivers of any possible changes.

What to do in Case of Pandemic Evolution or Regression?

Decisions regarding the return to school and the necessary protocols to put in place continue to come from Public Health. COVID-19 data analysis is provided by Public Health and considers several factors. School divisions must follow Public Health recommendations. Keep in mind that the scenario could change at any time, with little warning, depending on the Province's situation regarding COVID-19.

In the event Public Health removes physical-distancing restrictions, the DSFM schools will resume regular in-class programming.

The DSFM has already elaborated a plan in the event Public Health advises that students resume remote learning from home, much the same as the model which was in place from March until June.