

Date: August 20, 2021

RE: COVID-19

TO: Horizon Parents/Guardians, Students, and Staff

On August 13, 2021 the Minister of Education in conjunction with Dr. Hinshaw released public health guidelines to support school divisions with a successful return to school.

On July 28, 2021, the province communicated that there would be a return to normal on August 16, 2021. After closely monitoring COVID-19 in Alberta for the previous two weeks and reviewing emerging evidence from other jurisdictions, the Alberta government has made the decision that some health measures will continue until September 27, 2021.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, schools will use good health practices such as outlined in the [Guidance for Respiratory Illness Prevention and Management in Schools](#) and follow the [2021–22 School Year Plan](#). This includes a return to mandatory grade six and nine provincial achievement tests and grade 12 diploma exams.

The safety of children, students, and staff remains our top priority. We are looking forward to resuming in-person learning and seeing our students return to school. As we start the new year schools may continue with many activities as they normally would. These include activities and services such as, but not limited to:

- School wide assemblies
- Field trips
- Performance activities
- Physical activities including extracurricular events
- Visitors to the schools
- Food services
- Student transportation
- Ceremonies and celebratory events

While many routine school activities will no longer have any restrictions, we continue to implement a number of health measures based on the August 13, 2021 provincial requirements.

As we start the new school year:

- Students, families and school staff will continue to screen daily for symptoms using the [Alberta Health Daily Checklist](#). It will help you determine how to stay home from school and whether to arrange for testing.

- Schools will be using Appendix B of [*Guidance for Respiratory Illness Prevention and Management in Schools*](#) as a tool to manage
- symptomatic individuals and individuals Tested for COVID-19 (e.g. who should stay home and for how long).
 - NOTE: the term “afebrile”, used in Appendix B, means “not feverish”.
- Students and staff who have any new signs of illness should stay home and not attend school until they are feeling well.
 - If a student or staff member has any of the following core COVID-19 symptoms (new, or worsening and not related to other known causes), they are required to isolate for 10 days from onset of symptoms, or until they receive a negative COVID-19 test result, as per provincial guidelines:
 - ✓ Fever
 - ✓ Cough
 - ✓ Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - ✓ Loss of sense of smell or taste
 - ✓ Sore throat (adults only)
 - ✓ Runny nose (adults only)
- AHS will no longer be identifying or following up with close contacts and close contacts are no longer required to quarantine.
- Schools will be following good public health practices to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, including:
 - Encouraging good hand hygiene (e.g. washing hands and/or using hand sanitizer) and good respiratory etiquette (e.g. covering coughs sneezes with elbow or a tissue).
 - Cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces will continue on a daily basis as has been our practice for years.
 - Schools will be contacting parents should their child become sick while at school and requesting that parents make arrangements so that the student can go home. Sick students with COVID symptoms will be asked to wear a mask while waiting for parent pickup.
- Masking is not provincially required in school settings for any age group, except on school buses, where masking will be mandatory for grade 4-12 students.
 - While not mandated within schools, those wishing to wear masks while at school will be supported to do so.
- While the Alberta government communicated that school authorities continue to have the ability and corresponding accountability for any local masking requirements that are put in place that may exceed provincial guidance, we are not medical professions. Like you, we want our students and staff to remain safe. These last eighteen (18) months have shown us that actions have unintended consequences. When we take actions for one risk, we increase risks in other areas. As such, we will continue to rely on guidance from the Alberta Government, Alberta’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, and local public health officials regarding provincial and regional health measures based on local context. We will continue to work closely with Alberta Health and when facts warrant it, we will adjust recommendations when advised to

do so by Alberta Health. We remain committed to communicating when health measures are adjusted.

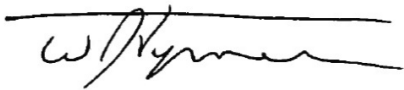
Alberta Health Services (AHS) will be providing the opportunity for students and staff to get a COVID vaccine while at school. This will be a temporary new in-school vaccination program like routine school immunizations that occur in Gr. 6, 7, and 9 where Public Health normally offers tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella vaccines. Vaccination clinics will be available in schools some time between September 7 and October 15 for eligible students in Grades 7-12, who have parental consent (students are not able to provide consent). Nurses will most likely only be in schools for 1 day per school during this time period. Staff in those schools will also be able to access vaccinations, if desired. A parent letter from AHS and parent consent forms are attached to this communication and we ask that those parents who wish to have their child(ren) vaccinated return the consent form at the start of the school year. Parents will be notified when health professionals will be in the building to provide vaccinations, should parents with vaccination concerns wish to keep their children home on that day. The choice to get a vaccine is an individual one; one that we respect. It is important to recognize that when those who are eligible to get vaccinated opt to do so they are reducing the risk to those who are unable to receive the vaccine at this time, such as younger children.

Schools have a history of working with Alberta Health Services when school absence due to illness is above 10%. Should schools see such an increase in absence due to illness, AHS may recommend additional measures such as temporary masking and cohorting requirements, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, and limiting larger gatherings and extracurricular activities to manage an outbreak and prevent more widespread transmission of a respiratory illness. Should enhanced measures be put in place, we will communicate that with parents, students, and staff.

I encourage you to read the [parent letter from the Chief Medical Officer of Health](#) and [parent guide](#) produced by Alberta Education as both provide helpful information for parents, students, and staff as they prepare for the return to school.

Students, parents/guardians, staff and visitors are encouraged to assess their personal risk factors and/or the risk factors for their families and take precautions that make sense in their situations. Whether it's choosing to wear a mask or maintaining additional space between themselves and others in certain situations, schools will support these personal choices, whenever possible.

Sincerely



Dr. Wilco Tymensen
Superintendent