

## Public Health Response to COVID-19 Activity in a School/Childcare Setting within the Winnipeg Health Region

**The VCC will no longer escalate school and childcare cases to the region, so PHNs will not typically be managing these cases.** Based on evolving evidence and experience in all sectors with the Omicron variant, case and contact management has shifted to self-management in these settings, with increased availability of self-administered rapid antigen tests and self-notification of contacts. Appendix C of the *Interim Guidance* document has been updated to reflect these changes.

### *Schools*

School administrators have been provided with the [Toolkit for Notification of Cases in Schools](#) by the province to manage COVID cases in the school setting (updated January 2022).

**School officials are no longer required to identify or notify close contacts at school, and notification letters on individual cases will no longer be sent out by schools.**

Key updates include:

- Parents do not need to notify close contacts within the school setting.
- Students and staff who are exposed at school can continue to attend as long as they are asymptomatic. Exposed students in classes/cohorts will no longer be asked to self-isolate (quarantine).
- Schools will collect information on self-reported cases and absenteeism (students and staff).
- Schools and Public Health will monitor for increased transmission in the school.
- Schools will complete an alert form and submit to Manitoba Education to identify any reported cases and/or absenteeism concerns. This will be reported to regional Public Health for further action.
  - Schools may also reach out to Public Health directly if they have a concern or question.
- When consulted, Public Health will lead a risk assessment and determine if further preventive measures in the school are required.
- If information collected suggests increased transmission at school, public health may recommend:
  - Further preventive measures such as pausing extra-curricular activities, field trips, assemblies, and moving to low risk activities during physical education and music classes.
  - A rapid test program and enhanced measures as recommended by public health.
  - A period of remote learning.
    - Remote learning for a school is an intervention of last resort when school absenteeism (staff and/or students) interferes with the classroom or school operation. For school-wide shifts to remote learning, schools must receive a risk assessment from public health officials and then approval from Manitoba Education.
- Letter templates are to be completed by a school official, and are included in the Quick Reference Guide.

### *Childcare Settings*

Childcare settings will be treated very similar to schools. Updated guidance for childcare settings can be found at the following link:

<https://manitoba.ca/fs/pubs/covid-19-elcc-practice-guide-jan-2022.pdf>

Updated February 14, 2022

### Key updates include:

- Case and contact management has shifted to self-management in these settings, and notification of close contacts by childcare centres is no longer required.
- Directors will no longer need to send letters to the school community to report individual cases; however, they should continue to report information on COVID-19 transmission in their centre to the childcare community.
- Attendance of children and staff will be based on symptom screening. Children or staff exposed to COVID-19 in the child care and school settings may continue to attend childcare and school if they are asymptomatic.
- Childcare centres will collect information on self-reported cases and absenteeism (children and staff).
- Childcare centres and Public Health will monitor for increased transmission in the childcare setting.
- There are no letter templates for childcare centres. Childcare directors are responsible for reporting interventions to their childcare community.

### New Process

- PHNs will continue to be consulted by schools and childcare centres within their community area (e.g. significant reports of positive rapid antigen tests, high absenteeism, multiple cases in a group or cohort within the past 14 days, etc.). In addition, MOHs and CDCs will receive alert forms from schools via Manitoba Education.
- Any school/childcare centre report requires a risk assessment to determine if any additional interventions need to be implemented. In particular, a school/childcare centre with multiple recent cases in a class/cohort requires an assessment on whether or not transmission is occurring within that school/childcare centre.
- For schools:
  - If PHN is contacted directly by a school official about increased COVID-19 activity in their school, gather further information and then consult with CDC regarding next steps.
    - When concerned about unexpected or unusual COVID-19 activity going on in the school, assess if:
      - the school appears to be the source of transmission linked to school cases (e.g. cases don't identify other types of contact such as household cases).
      - there is a high number of reported positive cases in a specific class or cohort.
      - there is unexpected absenteeism related to COVID-19 activity in school (note that with high COVID-19 activity, absenteeism of 20-40% is not unexpected, but may vary by school and community).
      - operational concerns, such as staffing shortages, where a school is unable to operate.
  - If school issue is reported by Manitoba Education through an alert form, CDC to respond to school official and consult with MOH, as applicable.

- For childcare centres:
  - If PHN is contacted directly by childcare director about increased COVID-19 activity in their centre, PHN to gather information and advise childcare director of any recommendations to decrease transmission in the childcare setting.
    - When concerned about unexpected or unusual COVID-19 activity going on in the centre, assess if:
      - the centre appears to be the source of transmission linked to their cases (e.g. cases don't identify other types of contact such as household cases).
      - there is a high number of reported positive cases in a specific cohort.
      - there is unexpected absenteeism related to COVID-19 activity (note that with high COVID-19 activity, absenteeism of 20-40% is not unexpected, but may vary by facility and community).
      - operational concerns, such as staffing shortages, where a centre is unable to operate.
    - Public health actions and directions are based on the specific circumstances and may include, but are not limited to:
      - reviewing the number of cases and absenteeism in the cohort/facility
      - recommendations for the facility, including testing of staff, and reducing higher risk activities
      - having the facility send a notification letter to families to recommend self-monitoring for symptoms, and to avoid non-essential contact, especially with individuals at risk of severe disease, and
      - assessing the need for facility closure, particularly if impacting operations. Facility closures or exclusion of cohorts is done as a measure of last resort.
  - Consult with a CDC, as it may be necessary to open an outbreak investigation in PHIMS.
- If the classroom/cohort/school/childcare centre is deemed to meet the threshold for an intervention, then the PHN/CDC/MOH to discuss with the director/principal and advise of the intervention for the cohort based on the results of the risk assessment. The individual of first contact should be the point person, unless otherwise directed.
- School and childcare centre interventions are to be documented in PHIMS by CDC lead, as per Appendix C of the *Interim Guidance* document.
- Schools and child care centres are to communicate with their community through a letter. Schools to report interventions (e.g. rapid testing, remote learning) to Manitoba Education, and childcare centres to report closures (for short or longer periods of time) or reductions in services provided by their centre to the ELCC program.