

COVID-19 Guidance for Schools on the Retrieval of Personal Property

This document provides guidance for schools for the safe retrieval of personal belongings by parents, students and staff while schools remain closed for in-person learning. Strategies can be adapted to meet the needs of different school environments. Read Toronto Public Health's [COVID-19 Guidance Elementary and Secondary Schools for further guidance](#).

The aim and purpose of this document is to assist schools with information related to the Ontario Government's reopening framework as well as Toronto Public Health requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It is important to know that breaches of some of these directions will constitute offences under provincial regulations or other public health legal requirements. While we aim to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional.

Current information about COVID-19 can be found in Toronto Public Health's [COVID-19 Fact Sheet](#).

Maintain a Healthy Environment

Set-up a screening area

- Designate an area outside, near the main entrance, as a screening station.
- Post signs for [staff/visitors](#) and [students](#) at all entrances instructing individuals not to enter the school if they are sick or answer yes to any of the questions.
- Post signage in visible areas which clearly explains the screening process, and the rules and conditions for entry.
- The screening station must allow a minimum of two metres/six feet distance between staff conducting screening and the individual being screened.
- Alternatively, a protective barrier (e.g. plexiglass) can be installed around the screening station.
- Make hand sanitizer available at the screening area.

Screen staff, students, and parents for COVID-19 symptoms before entering the school

- All school staff, students and parents must complete a COVID-19 symptom screening questionnaire for [school staff/visitors](#) and [students](#) before entering the school. The questions can be completed on a paper-based questionnaire (asked directly to employees/visitors and answers recorded), or can be completed electronically.

- Ensure individuals maintain two metres/six feet from others while waiting in line to be screened. There should be a limited number of individuals waiting in line outdoors. Individuals who are unable to maintain a two metre/six foot distance must wear a mask while they are outdoors, and at all times when they are indoors.

Scheduling

- People should be scheduled for access in designated timeslots to minimize the number of people in the building or waiting to access the schools; fifteen minute time slots are recommended.
- Anyone waiting for their designated time slot should be directed to a waiting or line up area with appropriate physical distancing makers (e.g. floor markings, pylons) spaced two meters/six feet apart.
- Consider designating the first appointments to vulnerable populations (e.g. seniors, people with an underlying medical conditions that you are made aware of).
- Keep a list of up-to-date contact information of individuals entering the school, including the date and time. This list will help Toronto Public Health with contact tracing if there is an individual who attends the school that is diagnosed with COVID-19 shortly after attending the school.

Entrances and exits

- Schools should designate and clearly mark specific, separate entrances and exits for each visitor as appropriate, and only permit entry and exit through these doors.
- Individuals should be required to sign in upon entry and sign out upon exit from the school.
- Anyone entering the building should clean their hands prior to entry and upon exit. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) should be provided.
- Where possible, doors and windows should be kept open to minimize the touching of door handles and increase ventilation, while maintaining the appropriate security.

Measures to ensure physical distancing

- Provide visible queues for parents/students who might be waiting in line outside the school by placing markers such as tape, safety cones/pylons or painted lines every two metres/six feet.
- Consider designing a flow for the school (with prominent signage and/or floor markings).
- Traffic flow and physical distancing markers should be visible throughout the school.
- Limit the number of people permitted in the school at any one time:
 - position a school employee at the entrance to control visitor entry
 - monitor the number of people entering and leaving the school
 - stagger entry into the school
 - once the maximum number of parents/students is reached, allow one person in for every person that leaves.

- People should be directed to stay only within the area(s) of the school they need to access and to refrain from lingering.
- Where possible, encourage the use of stairs. Where required, [elevator](#) use should be limited to one person or members of the same household.
- Students in grades 1 to 12 are required to wear a non-medical or cloth mask indoors at school, including in hallways and in classrooms with reasonable exceptions for medical conditions. Students are required to wear masks outdoors where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Students in junior and senior kindergarten are strongly recommended to wear masks in indoor spaces. They are also strongly recommended to wear a mask in outdoor spaces where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- All school staff are required to wear a medical mask at all times when indoors (except when eating or if alone in a private space) and when outdoors if physical distancing cannot be consistently maintained, unless exempt, in accordance with provincial and board of education requirements.
- School staff are strongly recommended to wear eye protection (e.g. face shield, goggles), in addition to a medical mask, in situations where physical distancing of at least two metres cannot be adequately and consistently maintained, in both indoor and outdoor settings.
- All visitors should wear a face mask or [non-medical face covering](#) when in the school.
- People should not be permitted to gather in groups on the school premises, except as permitted under the provincial regulation, as applicable. For example, for students that continue to attend the premises in accommodation of special education needs.

Packing and receiving personal property items

- Encourage individuals to bring their own reusable bags or boxes to pick up items.
- Provide clean carry-out bags if schools are packing up belongings for others.
- Returned items should be cleaned and disinfected if they need to be moved or used within three days. Otherwise, returned items should be left in the designated area for a minimum of three days before they are used or moved. After three days, the virus does not survive on paper and plastic surfaces.
- When receiving items that are outside of the school setting, [wash hands](#) regularly prior to and after handling items and avoid touching face, nose and mouth with hands.
- Use an [alcohol-based hand sanitizer](#) when hand washing is not possible. Washing with soap and water is preferred, and if hands are visibly dirty.
- Glove use is not a substitute for proper hand hygiene. If staff use gloves, it is important that:
 - Hands are washed and/or sanitized between changes.
 - Gloves are removed when changing tasks.
- When gloves are removed, new gloves must be used each time.

If individuals become ill at the school

If an individual starts to exhibit symptoms or becomes ill while in the school to retrieve their belongings, schools should take the following steps:

- School staff/visitors who become ill should be sent home immediately, and directed to [this webpage](#) to learn what to do next.
- If a student becomes ill with symptoms while in school, immediately separate them from others in a designated room and supervise the student until they are picked-up. Notify parents/guardians or emergency contacts to pick up the ill student as soon as possible. They should not use public transportation, including the school bus. If it is an emergency, call 911.
- The designated room/space must have a handwashing sink or hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available.
- If there is more than one ill individual who presents with symptoms, ideally they should be placed in separate designated rooms (if more than one room has been assigned for this purpose). If this is not possible, ensure the room is large enough and students are kept more than two metres apart.
- It is recommended that school staff, students and visitors with symptoms of COVID-19 go to an [assessment centre](#) for testing as soon as possible, and to [self-isolate](#) at home until their result is available. (See the School Decision Guide for [students](#) and [staff](#) to determine when students/staff are required to go for testing.)
- For further information, please see the [Toronto Public Health Guidance for Re-opening Schools JK-12: Isolate students and staff that become ill while at school](#) section.

Enhance environmental cleaning and disinfection

While schools are closed to in-person learning, some permissible attendances on school premises continue – such as for staff, students with special education needs, and as set out herein, for persons retrieving belongings. TPH expects that even while schools are closed to in-person learning, schools continue to follow TPH's general school guidance, as applicable. Some of these expectations are set out below:

- Ensure frequent cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces and common areas such door handles, counters, cabinet doors, elevator buttons, light switches, faucets, toilet handles, hand rails, touch screen surfaces and keypads, and returned school items. Common areas should have soap, hand sanitizer and/or disinfectant wipes available. If wipes are not available, general disinfectants can be used.
- Review Public Health Ontario's [Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Settings](#) fact sheet.
- Refer to [Health Canada's lists of hard-surface disinfectants for use against coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

Maintain heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems

- Increase the introduction and circulation of outdoor air by maximizing the outdoor air ratio of the HVAC system settings, or by opening windows and doors, where possible. However, do not open windows and doors if doing so poses a safety risk to school staff and students.
- Ensure the HVAC system(s) are adequately maintained.
- Where provided, use the highest efficiency filters that are compatible with the HVAC system.
- Increase air-exchanges if possible.
- Rooms where ceiling fans are used should have an upward airflow rotation.
- Schools without HVAC systems should increase ventilation by opening windows (when possible) and classroom doors.
- Keep areas near HVAC inlets and outlets clear.
- Seating should be arranged away from areas with high airflow (i.e. not in front of air vents).
- If portable fans are used, limit the blowing of air across people and surfaces by positioning them to provide an upward movement of air.
- During the winter months when the temperatures are cold, consider opening windows or doors when students are not in the classroom, or for very brief periods every hour
- For more information please see our fact sheet [COVID-19 Transmission, Aerosols and Ventilation](#).

Workplace health and safety

- Employers must have written measures and procedures for staff safety, including for infection prevention and control.
- Ontario has general information on [COVID-19 and workplace health and safety](#). Learn about employer responsibilities and how to protect workers at work.
- Workers can also get information about [health and safety protections](#) at the workplace.
- Go to the [Ministry of Labour, Training, Health and Safety](#).

More information

For more information, visit our website at www.toronto.ca/COVID19 or call us at 416-338-7600.

References

Ministry of Education Information (May 27, 2020) *Personal Property Retrieval Guidelines for Schools*.

Toronto Public Health, [COVID-19 Guidance for the Re-opening of Schools JK to 12](#).