

To: Saskatchewan's Education Sector

Date: September 17, 2021

From: Population Health Branch, Ministry of Health

Re: COVID-19 Mask Use, Case and Contact Management in Schools

Saskatchewan is now in its 4th wave of the COVID-19 pandemic fueled by the Delta variant and there is an increased risk of transmission across Saskatchewan. Students have returned to in-class learning and this letter is to provide you with information about COVID-19 mandatory mask use, and case and contact management, effective September 17, 2021.

Schools have a large population of individuals who are not yet eligible for COVID-19 vaccine, therefore the risk of transmission into schools remains high. Experience indicates that school-associated cases reflect community transmission and the risk of transmission within schools is low when routine and enhanced infection control precautions are in place.

While the Delta variant is more transmissible, current evidence indicates that hospitalization rates among children cases remain stable and low (~1 per cent).

FACE COVERINGS (MASKS)

As of September 17, 2021, mask use in all indoor public locations in Saskatchewan, including in schools, is mandatory. This will be in place until further notice.

Exemptions include:

- While playing a woodwind, brass, or other instrument operated by breath, but only if they can maintain a distance of three metres from other individuals, as measured from the mouth or opening/bell end of the instrument, whichever is closest, to another individual while playing
- For individuals under 18 years of age, while participating in athletic or sports activities, for the duration of the sport or activity.

All spectators, staff, volunteers, and those who are coaching are not exempt from the mask policy. Students who are walking to the stage, courts, ice, pitch, etc. must wear masks, however when they begin play, the masks may be removed.

SELF-ISOLATION IN SCHOOLS AND CHILD CARE CENTRES

Case and contact management in schools continues to be of high priority for the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Timely notification of potential exposures for staff and students will assist in keeping students in the school setting, which supports their mental health, academic, social and physical development, and the social inequities that result from extended employee absences to care for their children.

During the last school year, entire classrooms were commonly required to self-isolate for 14 days from their last exposure to the case. This year's approach is based on prioritizing the importance of maintaining in-class learning.

In the event of contact with a positive case, the following flow chart provides a visual of the steps to consider and implications for students as noted in the updated Public Health Order which can be found [here](#).

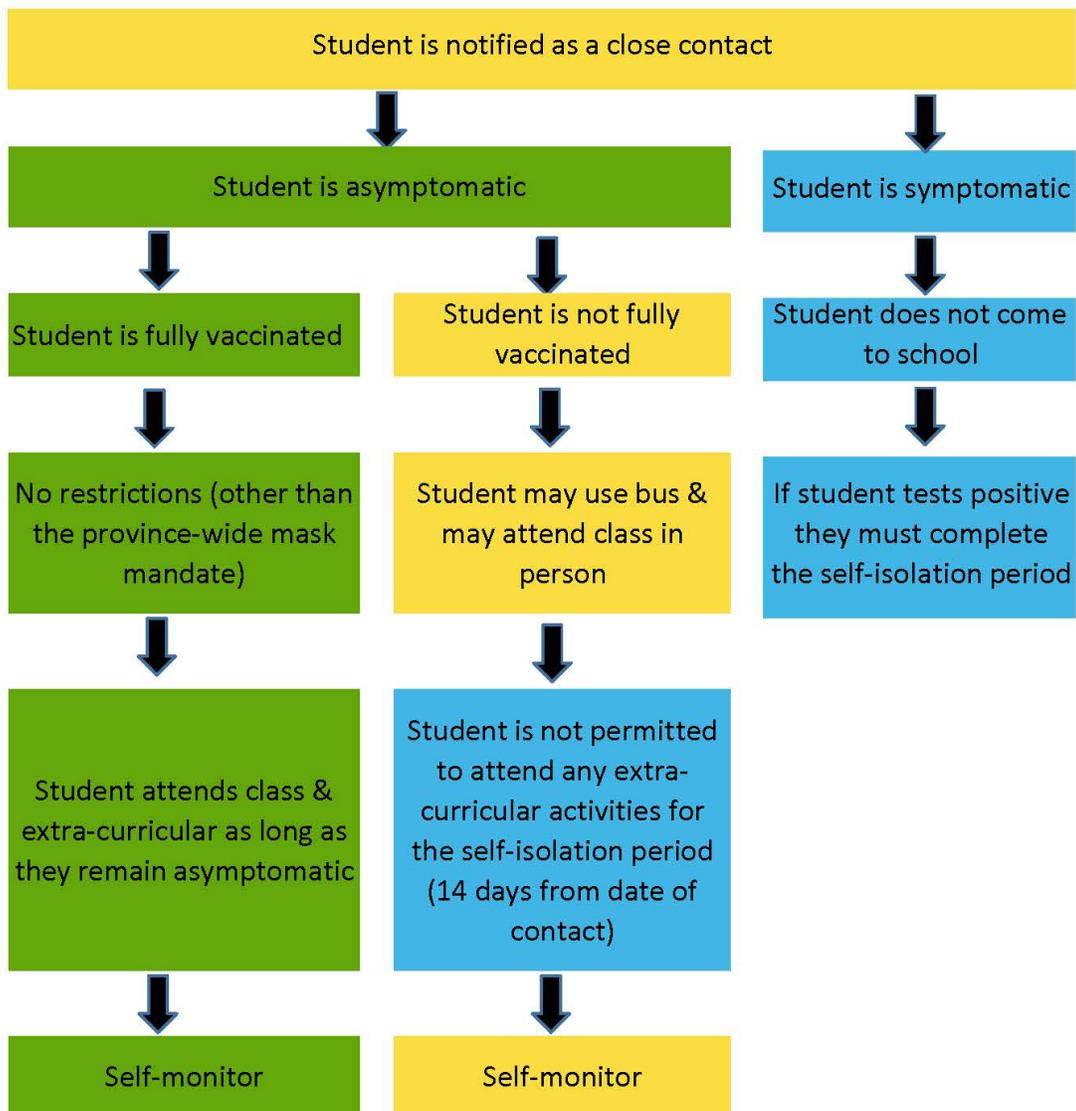
Staff members (teachers, educational assistants, bus drivers, etc.) who are not fully vaccinated and identified as a close contact from any exposure to a COVID-19 case are NOT exempt from self-isolation (for 14 days following last exposure). The COVID-19 transmission risk is higher from adults to adults and from adults to children in the school, household and community setting. Schools should assume that staff members who are close contacts due to case(s) in school are unvaccinated and required to self-isolate, unless the staff member provides proof of vaccination. Fully vaccinated staff who are asymptomatic may continue to work as usual while they monitor themselves for symptoms.

Medical Health Officers strongly encourage schools to implement additional enhanced precautions including:

- Promote hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, environmental cleaning, ventilation, self-testing (rapid testing) where available;
- Any staff and students feeling unwell should stay home until symptoms resolve;
- Diagnostic testing is recommended if someone develops COVID-19 symptoms, but proof of negative test not required to return to school; and,
- Encouraging everyone who is eligible gets both doses of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series, including household members of students and staff.

Saskatchewan Schools: Student Close Contact Protocol

Province-wide mask mandate applies to all students per new masking order



PROCESS FOR CASE AND CONTACT MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS:

- Public Health will assess if the positive case is a student or staff member and if they attended school while infectious (potential exposures).
- Public reporting of cases in schools will continue to be available at Saskatchewan.ca.

CONTACT NOTIFICATION:

- Public Health will continue to notify the school of potential exposures. Public Health will work with the case and school to identify affected classrooms or other settings (e.g., bus routes).
- Public Health will provide communication for affected classrooms that the school will disseminate through their existing distribution list(s).
- Public Health communication will use template letters as notification to parents and guardians of the exposure in the school setting that will include guidance on self-monitoring, exemptions from self-isolation, testing and vaccination.

OUTBREAKS IN SCHOOLS:

If a Medical Health Officer (MHO) declares an outbreak in a school setting, Public Health will notify the school and will provide communication to go to the entire school that the school will disseminate through existing distribution lists.

- MHOs may order schools to implement specific outbreak control measures (*The Public Health Act, 1994, s38(1) and (2)*).
- Public disclosure of outbreaks in schools will continue to be available on Saskatchewan.ca.

The Ministry of Health and MHOs will continue to monitor school case rates and transmission patterns. School divisions are encouraged to use their established processes for schools to monitor absenteeism and report illness that are of benefit to the control of COVID-19.

- Schools are required to report cases or carriers of communicable diseases to the MHO (*The Public Health Act, 1994, s32(1)(c)*) and cases of serious illness and when serious illness is occurring at a high rate (*s31.1(2)*).

For further information regarding COVID-19, please call Health Line at 811, and/or visit the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health website at www.saskatchewan.ca/covid19.