

August 30, 2022

To: Superintendents of Public Schools and Principals of Independent School Authorities

Re: Supports provided to schools by Northern Health

Schools and Northern Health (NH) have a common interest in helping students stay safe and healthy. In this letter, we would like to outline the supports NH provides to schools in Northern BC. Please distribute to all schools under your authority as appropriate.

Communicable disease preventative measures

According to the [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) (BCCDC), students, staff, and others can take preventive actions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases in Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) school settings. Staff can attend school safely when we work together to follow public health recommendations. These include:

- Eligible individuals get all recommended doses of a COVID-19 vaccine
- Schools implementing and updating communicable disease plans
- Students, staff, and parents/caregivers follow school communicable disease plans
- NH providing additional guidance when there is greater risk in a community

Together, these steps can help prevent the spread of communicable diseases like COVID-19 in schools. ¹

For more information, see these communicable disease guidance documents:

- [Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)
- [Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K to 12 Settings](#)
- [Sneezes and Diseases](#) website and [Sneezes and Diseases](#) resource book
- [Quick Guide to Common Childhood Diseases](#)
- [K-12 Schools and COVID-19 - School staff](#)

¹ BC Centre for Disease Control (April 2022) [School staff \(BCCDC\)](#)

Absenteeism Reporting

As of the 2017-2018 school year, NH no longer requires schools to routinely report when absenteeism is greater than 10%. We do encourage schools to track absenteeism and reasons for absences in order to detect situations where increased attention to infection control may be necessary.

Should you require our assistance with infection control strategies or if you become concerned about a situation involving a more urgent infectious disease (e.g. measles, mumps, or pertussis), please contact us ([see contact information on page 5](#)).

Early communication will ensure:

- Schools, students, and their families receive timely and accurate health information
- Any necessary infection control measures are implemented promptly
- NH is able to take additional action in the broader community if required

Mandatory reporting of immunizations for school children and youth

BC's Vaccination Status Reporting Regulation (VSRR) came into effect on July 1, 2019.² The regulation requires parents and guardians to report the vaccination status of their school-aged children, and health authorities to seek missing records and offer catch-up. It applies to all students in all schools within British Columbia, including those who are home-schooled³. Having up-to-date records of children's immunizations enables health authorities to respond effectively to disease outbreaks and to recommend immunizations that a child might be missing.

Role of schools in the school year ahead:

- **By September 30, 2022:** Private schools not participating with Student Information eXchange system (STIX) provide NH local Interprofessional Team (IPT) representative with class enrollment lists for ALL grades⁴. Enrollment lists include student: legal first name and last name, date of birth, sex, Indigenous status, mailing address, school, and grade and division data.

² Vaccination Status Reporting Regulation FAQ (2020) available online <https://immunizebc.ca/vaccination-status-reporting-regulation>

³ It does not apply to children attending schools operated by a participating First Nation, on a reserve, or by a Treaty First Nation or the Nisga'a Nation

⁴ The "[Student Records Order](#)" made under section 9 of the *Independent School Regulation* requires independent school authorities to have procedures that "permit the student record kept by the authority for a student or child to be disclosed to a person who is planning for the delivery of, or delivering, health services, social services or other support services to that student or child." As noted on page 10 of [Student Records Best Practice \(gov.bc.ca\)](#), parental consent is not required for the disclosure of this information. If an independent school has any questions about the requirements relating to student record disclosure they should contact the Independent Schools Unit of the Ministry of Education and Child Care at: EDUC.independentSchoolsOffice@gov.bc.ca

- **Mid-January, 2023:** Distribute by email or other distribution channel a generic letter to all parents of students in all grades, including those who are home-schooled. This letter will be emailed to schools from NH Medical Health Officers, or sent via hard copy to schools that do not have email addresses.
- **By January 31, 2023:** Schools will receive box(es) of confidential sealed letters. School personnel distribute sealed personalized letters to students in grades kindergarten through 12 (except grades 6 and 9 for which immunization clinics have occurred - or will occur - during the school year).
- **By February 17, 2023,** schools confirm with NH local IPT representative that the boxes of letters have been received and that all confidential letters to individual students have been distributed. Provide any letters that cannot be distributed back to NH.

Out of Scope (school personnel will NOT):

- Contact parents to ask for immunization information
- Review students' immunization information
- Receive immunization records from students
- Answer parent questions regarding the VSRR
- Receive/distribute letters to students who do not attend school (i.e. are home schooled or who are enrolled in NH-based distance education programs)

For any questions about the VSRR and role of schools, please email Mike Gagel, Regional Manager Communicable Disease at mike.gagel@northernhealth.ca.

Thank you for helping to keep our children and communities healthy.

School health supports

Fostering healthy schools involves ongoing support and open, two-way communication between the school and dedicated health professionals throughout the school year. To facilitate this, each school is attached to NH's local IPT. Schools can expect a member from this team to be in contact with them at the beginning of the school year. The team will support them with priorities such as:

- Routine grade 6 and 9 immunizations
- Providing annual education and consultation for school staff around potentially life-threatening illnesses such as anaphylaxis and diabetes (including glucagon administration when requested by a parent)
- Urgent and routine communicable disease and infection control issues

Please note:

- The 2022-2023 school year is a provincially mandated dental screening year for all kindergarten students for data collection and reporting. Schools will be contacted by NH dental staff to set up classroom screening dates and times for students who were not assessed at a kindergarten health event.

Some services may vary from community to community and school to school.

In addition to the IPT:

The Regional Nursing Lead, Healthy Schools and Youth, follows a comprehensive school health approach to support schools and school districts across the north with health promotion initiatives. This role supports the IPT and acts as a liaison between schools and NH by coordinating the supports, resources, and programs that are available on various health topics related to:

- Communicable disease
- Dental health
- Harm reduction
- Injury prevention
- Immunizations
- Nutrition
- Mental wellness
- Physical activity
- Sexual health

For more information and resources visit NH's [School and youth health](#) webpage. You may also email: HealthySchools@northernhealth.ca.



The Regional Population Health Dietitian, Lead - School-Age Nutrition, can provide guidance and support to schools and school districts across the north related to:

- Age-appropriate food literacy
- Body image curriculum supports
- School food programs (e.g. salad bars, local food to school activities, menu planning)
- Grant opportunities
- Food allergy management and prevention
- Applying school food guidelines
- Policy development and more

For more information and resources visit NH's [Healthy eating at school](#) webpage. You may also email: PopHthNutrition@NorthernHealth.ca

Subscribe to "[Healthier Northern Communities E-Brief](#)" to get monthly updates throughout the school year for granting opportunities, health promotion initiatives, training opportunities, and resources. To subscribe, send a blank email with "subscribe" in the subject line to healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca.

When and how to get in touch with NH and BC Emergency Health Services:

Situation	Contact
Individual(s) in need of immediate medical care	Call 9-1-1.
<p>Urgent questions or concerns about contagious diseases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large clusters or outbreaks of common illnesses, such as gastrointestinal illness, influenza-like illness, or pink eye (conjunctivitis) • Cases of uncommon contagious diseases, such as measles, mumps, or pertussis (whooping cough) <p>Routine local planning related to non-urgent health issues such as immunizations.</p>	<p>Contact the IPT member assigned to your school from your local health unit.</p> <p>This team will be reaching out to school principals early in the school year to provide specific contact information.</p> 
<p>To learn more about Comprehensive School Health or to discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District or school priorities regarding health concerns • Health promotion, resources, or strategies • Questions about other health concerns, such as mental wellness, body image, and nutrition 	<p>Contact the Regional Nursing Lead for Healthy Schools and Youth, via email at healthyschools@northernhealth.ca,</p> 

To review our previous communications on school and youth topics such as COVID-19, opioid overdose, vaping, measles, a public health approach to non-medical cannabis etc., please visit NH's [School and youth health](#) webpage and select Communications to Schools from Medical Health Officers.

Thank you for your attention to this information. We look forward to working together to ensure a safe and healthy school year.

Yours truly,

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