

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: Navigating the 2021-2022 School Year Plan

Return to school plans, public health orders, and divisional policy remain responsive to the current circumstances and levels of the pandemic response system. The information provided will be continually updated to reflect the most current circumstances.

Masks

- **Who will provide students and staff with masks?** The division will continue to supply all schools with medical-grade masks. There will be adult versions and pediatric versions for younger students. The division will continue to procure the masks from the province.
- **When can students take mask breaks?** According to provincial policy updated as of August 24, 2021, mask breaks can only occur where there is physical distancing of two (2) metres. Masks can be removed when outside. Masks should always be used in common areas and during transition times within and outside of the classroom. School staff should consider structuring mask breaks for students throughout the day by prioritizing outdoor movement.
- **What about kids whose parents refuse to let them wear masks?** Schools are encouraged to continue to build understanding and consensus regarding mask usage within the community as much as possible. Students must wear a mask unless they provide a note from their family physician for a medical exemption.
- **Should students wear masks while singing?** Yes.
- **Should students wear masks during lunch?** Students should only remove the mask when eating.
- **Do students have to wear masks outside?** No.
- **Do students have to wear masks during physical education classes?** Students should wear masks whenever indoors as much as possible. This may vary depending on the type of physical activity and the size of the group relative to the size of the space.
- **Can I wear a cloth mask?** All staff and students are encouraged to wear a medical-grade mask provided by the division. Staff and students may either wear a cloth mask over or under their medical-grade mask if they wish.
- **How often should students change their mask?** Students will likely go through at least two (2) masks every day. This will depend on the needs and habits of the individual student. Note that a mask should be changed immediately if it gets moist, dirty or damaged. More information about mask protocols can be found [here](#).
- **How will we procure, manage, and dispose of the masks?** Pembina Trails has a substantial inventory of masks and will continue to procure more from the province as needed. Schools should continue to order masks through the purchase order process at no cost. Schools should have multiple mask recycling receptacles in the building to ensure that masks are not ending up in the trash. If schools require mask recycling receptacles, please contact [Lorie Carriere](#) for more information.

- **Do students with special needs who cannot wear a mask have to submit a medical note?** Yes, the policy would apply to all students, including students with special needs.
- **Are students for whom we are awaiting medical exemption documentation allowed to attend school?** Yes, if parents are engaged in a dialogue with school administration and it is evident that documentation is forthcoming. If it is evident that there will be no documentation forthcoming, school administration should contact their SAT-link to discuss next steps.

Working in close physical proximity with students who have special needs

- **Should staff continue to wear eye protection in code yellow when working in close proximity with certain students?**
 - Eye protection is required depending upon risk.
 - Eye protection (e.g. face shields) are worn by staff members if they assess they are likely to have splash or splatter exposure to saliva or other bodily fluids when [Supporting Students Who Require Interventions Or Supports That Must Be Delivered In Close Physical Proximity](#).
 - Find product specifications for face shields and goggles [here](#).
 - Retain eye protection for full shift.
 - When eye shields are removed, clean, disinfect, and store them as per protocol.
 - See [Guidance on Disinfecting Re-usable Eye Protection](#).
 - For disposal protocols, please see [Manitoba School Boards Association School Re-Entry Protocols: A Reference Guide for Schools](#) .

Winter Concerts and Other Performances

- **Can we plan for winter concerts and other performances?** Divisional guidelines for assemblies should be followed when planning concerts. However, at this time, there are no spectators allowed indoors for sporting events, so this also applies to school concerts. Until this changes, any concerts will have to be performed for the students and staff in the school.

PAC Events

- **Can the PAC host events that bring the community together outside of school hours?** Schools should consider their individual circumstances when deciding whether a community event can be achieved given the current public health orders for gatherings.
- **Can the PAC organize hot lunches this year?** Yes, if PAC members follow divisional guidelines for [food safety](#) and show proof of vaccination before entering the school. PAC members may organize and distribute pre-packaged food items, but may not prepare or come in contact with the food directly.
- **Can PAC resume in-person meetings at the school?** Yes, as long as all participants are fully vaccinated. As in the past, a permit must be issued for the meeting and done by the school admin. Schools may consider streaming the meeting to allow for non-vaccinated parents and guardians to participate.

Sporting Events

- In development

Pow Wows and other Indigenous Cultural Events

- In development

Overnight Camps

- ***Are overnight camps allowed?*** Not at this time.

Vaccinations and COVID-19 Tests

- ***How will we verify vaccination status?*** We will provide more information on this shortly.
- ***Do tradespeople who work in school facilities require proof of vaccination to enter to do their work?*** General contractors and their sub-contractor's staff working inside school spaces for regular and pro-longed periods where children are present will be required to be fully immunized by October 31, 2021 or have proof of negative test results. General contractors and their sub-contractor's staff working outside are not required to show vaccination status.
- ***Can staff who are not vaccinated attend divisional PD sessions or collaborate with staff in other divisional buildings?*** Staff members may attend provided they have followed the protocols outlined in the vaccination protocols
- ***Who pays for COVID-19 tests of unvaccinated staff?*** The province has stated that they will eventually provide some rapid test kits to schools. When those are not available, staff will need to go to a COVID-19 testing centre. School test kits will likely not be available until at least mid-September, therefore, staff who are not fully vaccinated should plan to get COVID-19 tests regularly at provincial testing facilities. All costs for testing are covered by the province or the individual. School division have no funds for this purpose.
- ***What if I want to go on a field trip to a place that has vaccine requirements?*** Such sites should not be selected for field trip purposes for pupils in grades 7 to 12 (or who are 12 years of age or older). All adults accompanying field trips should be prepared to produce their vaccination proof.
- ***Can we have volunteers in the school again?*** Yes, as long as they are fully vaccinated and adhere to all protocols.
- ***Do we need to ask the screening questions of all students before they enter the building?*** No, unless a student is displaying a symptom that warrants screening. All students should be encouraged to screen for COVID-19 symptoms at home prior to arriving at school.

For more information, please refer to the [Pembina Trails School Division Staff Vaccination Update](#).

Itinerant Staff And Staff That Work In Multiple Classrooms

- ***Will itinerant staff return to their original positions working in multiple schools?*** Yes. Any staff attending a school that does not align with their regular schedule must sign in at the office upon arrival.

- **Will clinical services staff be returning to working with students in schools?** Yes.
Note that like all staff, itinerant staff must be fully vaccinated and wear medical grade masks when in schools. If they are not fully vaccinated, they must follow the testing protocol.

Ventilation And Air Filtration

- **What is being done to ensure ventilation systems are working properly?**
Our Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) service providers have been dispatched to optimize operation of our existing HVAC systems. Along with our HVAC service providers, our Divisional staff are trained to implement and continue regular equipment maintenance.
- **What is being done to verify filters are installed correctly?**
We are doing more frequent filter checking and monitoring. During these inspections, filter changes occur if they are dirty, surface loaded, and/or preventing air flow. The filters are also checked to make sure they are properly sized, fitted, and rated for that ventilation system.
- **In addition to having properly working ventilation systems, are there other measures being utilized to bring in additional fresh air?**
Weather permitting, opening windows has been encouraged.

In addition to the above measures, the basic principles of physical distancing, surface cleaning and disinfection, hand hygiene, personal protective equipment, screening, and other public health fundamentals form part of a layered approach.

Music

- **Should students wear masks while singing?** Yes.
- **Are there time limits for how long students can be in a band or music class that involves singing?** There are no limits at this time.
- **Can Music be taught in the music room?** Yes.
- **Does Music have to be taught in the music room?** No. While the weather is favourable, we encourage everyone to leverage the outdoors for teaching and learning.

This guidance is based on Manitoba Education's [Restoring Safe Schools Planning Guide for 2021–2022 School Year](#) and may continue to evolve, especially in light of the imminent release of updated public health orders.

Physical Distancing

- **Do we need to maintain two (2) metres of distancing between students?** We should maintain distancing up to two (2) metres to the extent possible. Physical distancing should be prioritized in common areas. We are not presently dividing classes into two separate spaces.
- **What do teachers need to consider when trying to maintain appropriate distancing?** Individual classroom teachers will develop routines for their school day that will minimize close interactions between students.

- **What about staff meetings, school assemblies, professional development sessions, etc.?** Staff gatherings, including meetings, should be planned with the information in the divisional plan for assemblies in mind. Staff visiting and learning from and with colleagues in other schools will return.
- **Is it OK if some kids are closer together than others?** Larger classroom spaces should be assigned to larger groups. Class groupings should be set up to allow for the most distancing possible between students, while seated in class. This may mean that extra furniture will not yet return to classroom.

Lockers and Student Belongings

- **Are students expected to keep all of their belongings with them all day long?** Students are generally encouraged to keep their belongings with them throughout the day; however, where school facilities or populations allow for the organization of students to use cubbies, hooks, lockers, etc. with physical distancing in place and ensuring that congestion is avoided, schools may take advantage of some of the available storage in the school and in individual classrooms.

Hygiene and Cleaning

- **Do we need to follow the same cleaning schedule, protocols, and routines as last year?** Custodial staff are returning to their pre-COVID19 shifts. As per our normal practice, intensive cleaning will occur during the evening shift. Cleaning and disinfecting will focus on high-touch surfaces and common areas, but cleaning schedules can return to normal practices. Washrooms are the exception as they require more intensive cleaning. These facilities should also be used in a staggered manner. Ensure washrooms are cleaned and disinfected before and after school, as well as a third time during the day.
- Schools will be prepared to enhance cleaning measures and protocols when required.
- Schools should pay particular attention to entryways to ensure regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces.

Visitors and Building Access

- **Will buildings continue to be locked?** Yes. This will ensure that all visitors have their vaccination status verified by school staff before entering.
- **Who verifies vaccination status for groups using facilities outside of school hours?** We are reviewing current protocols and working on making necessary updates that align with public health orders and divisional policy.

Contact Tracing and Isolation

- **Do visitors still need to sign in when coming into school buildings.** Yes, all visitors must continue to sign in and out of buildings and indicate where they will be within the building. This will help facilitate contact tracing should the need arise. Regular staff who are in the building

they are scheduled to work in on that day do not need to sign in as their attendance is registered in AMS.

- ***What happens if there is a positive COVID-19 case in the school?*** School administrators will continue to follow the directions provided in the provincial toolkit as they did last year.

- ***If I'm deemed a close contact but I have been fully vaccinated, will I still need to self-isolate?*** Public health officials will help determine whether you are exempt from needing to self-isolate. Individuals who are fully vaccinated should monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following any exposure. If any symptoms develop, they should isolate immediately and get tested for COVID-19. [More information](#).
- ***If I have any symptoms but I have been fully vaccinated, do I need to self-isolate?*** Yes. You must isolate yourself immediately if symptoms develop and get tested for COVID-19. Public health officials will determine when you can return to work.
- ***What if a household member is directed to self-isolate? Do I need to isolate as well?*** [Public Health](#) will provide any directions for self-isolation.

The divisional infographic about COVID-19 and isolation requirements is currently being updated.

Cohorts

- ***Which grades will be cohorted?*** For the fall of 2021, cohorts will be used in Kindergarten to Grade 6 to assist with contact tracing and to minimize exposure of students who are currently ineligible to be vaccinated.
- ***Will class sizes be kept smaller to allow for greater distancing?*** We are following the pre-pandemic guidelines for class sizes.
- ***Can I have more than 75 students in a cohort?*** Preferably not. Instead, consider making several smaller cohorts.
- ***Do I need to consider buses when I make classroom cohorts?*** No. Buses are their own cohort. Students can be part of multiple cohorts. We have cohorts to assist with separating students as much as possible, but also to assist with contact tracing and isolation should there be an infection within a cohort. Therefore, it is essential to know where each cohort is during the school day and who exactly is in each cohort.
- ***Can staff cross cohorts?*** Yes. Any teacher can be in contact with multiple student cohorts. Note that all staff must be fully vaccinated and wear medical-grade masks. If staff are not fully vaccinated, they must adhere to testing protocols.
- ***Do we need to keep students in cohorts during recess?*** Schools are advised to maintain cohorting as much as possible by designating specific areas of the schoolyard to specific cohorts. It is possible to have more than one smaller cohort in the same area if necessary.

Students Visiting Schools Other Than Their Homeschool

- ***What are the vaccine requirements for students born on or before December 31, 2009 when they periodically have to go to another school in the division?*** If they are going for curricular reasons (i.e. Industrial Arts classes, band classes, etc.) then they are allowed to attend regardless of their vaccination status. If they are attending for any extra-curricular activities, they are allowed to attend regardless of their vaccination status. Please note that this also applies to students from non-Pembina Trails schools.

- **Can students visit other schools to see friends or for non-instructional purposes?** No. This would be cross-cohorting. Visitations between schools for non-curricular reasons will not be allowed unless it is an exceptional circumstance and has been given prior approval by the principal.

Lunch and Cafeteria

- **What are the requirements for school cafeterias?**
 - Cafeterias (or areas selling food) must ensure that staff/students are reasonably able to maintain separation of at least two (2) metres. Masks may be removed when consuming food/drink, when seated.
 - Efforts should be made to choose spaces for lunch for Kindergarten to Grade 6 students that maximize distancing and minimize overcrowding and cross-cohorting.
- **Can students use microwave ovens during the lunch hour?** Students are encouraged to bring lunches that do not require reheating at school.

This guidance is based on Manitoba Education's [Restoring Safe Schools Planning Guide for 2021–2022 School Year](#) and may continue to evolve, especially in light of the imminent release of updated public health orders.

We will have more to discuss regarding the complexities of making lunch as safe as possible in the context of the fourth wave and the age-group of students who are ineligible to be vaccinated.

Students Working In Small Groups In Class

- **What about centres and group work in class?** While this section of the divisional plan was written specifically for the Kindergarten context, most of the content applies to students working in groups in any grade.

Community Liaison Workers

- **Can they return to school and go out into the community?** Yes, in keeping with past practice and if they are fully vaccinated and wear a medical mask in their work. If they are not fully vaccinated, they must adhere to testing protocols.

Staffroom Use

- **Can we use the staffroom again?** Yes. Staff should wear their mask at all times except when eating. Special consideration should be given to seating to avoid overcrowding as much as possible.

School Patrols

- **Can we continue with school patrols?** Yes. Students should wash or sanitize their hands before taking their equipment and after they put it back.

Funding

- **Will there be additional funds provided for COVID-19 purchases?** Pembina Trails will continue to procure medical-grade masks and COVID-19 test kits from the province, and the division will continue to provide hand sanitizer to schools.

COVID-19 Signage

- **Do we reprint last year's signs or do we use different signs for this year?** We have redone the signs. Please check with Erin Kozier/Lorie Carriere if you have not already done so.

High School Students in Common Areas

- **Where can high school students go at lunch hour and during spares?** Students can access all common areas during these periods. They should wear a mask and the spaces should be setup to encourage physical distancing as much as possible.
- **Can we open weight rooms and wellness rooms?** Yes. Students must wear masks, equipment must be setup to maintain physical distancing and sanitation protocols must also be in place.

Washrooms

- **Should there still be a limit of students that can be in the washroom at a time?** Measures should be put in place to limit the number of students who can use the washroom at the same time. Examples would include closing some stalls, shutting water off of every second sink, etc.

Drinking Fountains

- **Refillable stations can be used but can the regular fountains be used?** Students are encouraged to bring their own refillable water bottle to school. For now, regular water fountains should not be used.

Kindergarten

- **Will there be an expectation that all toys be cleaned/sanitized between the morning and afternoon classes?** As per standard procedures, it is recommended that schools have toys that are easily cleaned and disinfected. It may be prudent to increase the frequency of the cleaning schedule for these items, especially when illness is circulating in the setting or the local community, or if symptomatic staff and children have been touching the toys. Toys without hard surfaces, should be removed as they cannot be easily cleaned.
- **Can we do a staggered entry for kindergarten students as we had done in the past?** Yes. Please use the staggered entry period to begin to teach students the health and hygiene protocols. There is no staggered entry for other grades this year as almost all of the students are familiar with the protocols from last year. Teachers of all grades should begin the school year by reviewing the health and hygiene protocols and routines.