

Recommendations to Enhance the COVID-19: Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for Schools (2021-22)

Version 2 – September 7, 2021

Summary of updates from previous version

- *Recommendation for all participants in inter-school sports to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, if eligible (pg. 5).*
- *Additional consideration for schools to delay resumption of non-curriculum sport activities (e.g. inter-school sport activities) while assessing the impact of school reopening on COVID-19 transmission (pg. 6).*

OVERVIEW

The *COVID-19: Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for Schools (2021-22)* contains minimum return-to-school guidance issued by the Ministry of Education for the 2021-22 school year. Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) has provided additional recommendations below, which are to be used in conjunction with the Ministry of Education’s operational guidance. It does not replace the advice, guidelines, recommendations, directives, or other direction of provincial Ministries; however, the recommendations are strongly encouraged to enhance the health and safety in Huron and Perth schools. Schools should continue to monitor for new guidance from the Ministry of Education or Ministry of Health related to schools.

GOAL

Minimize COVID-19 transmission within the school setting and reduce interruptions to in-person learning.

	Ministry of Education Guidance	HPPH Recommendations
Student Masking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade 1-12 students: non-medical masks required indoors and on school vehicles. • Junior and Senior Kindergarten: encouraged but not required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masking strongly recommended for Junior and Senior Kindergarten students, including on school vehicles.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks not required outdoors, but physical distancing should be encouraged between cohorts as much as possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masking required outdoors if distancing not maintained between cohorts, including outdoor sports where masks can be safely worn.
Staff Masking/PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medical masks required indoors for all staff and visitors. Not required outdoors. Eye protection required for education staff working in close contact with students not wearing masks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff masking required outdoors when distancing cannot be maintained.
Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All staff and students must self-screen every day before attending school. Ministry of Education may direct school boards and schools to perform daily on-site confirmation of self-screening and are expected to have a process in place if directed to do so. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active screening required daily; confirmation of screening required after OBs, during increased community transmission, after school breaks (e.g. October and December holidays).
Staff meetings/staff rooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congregation of teachers/staff should be limited to minimize potential for adult-to-adult transmission. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No in-person staff meetings; to be reassessed once case counts have a sustained decline for four weeks. Distancing and masking (when not removed to eat) required in common staff areas, with sign-in sheet for all users.
Recess/breaks outdoors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students do not need to stay within their cohort during recess and breaks outdoors, but distancing should be encouraged in between cohorts as much as possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain distancing between cohorts at recess as much as possible; masking required if unable to maintain distance between cohorts. Playground structures do not need to be cleaned or disinfected

		between uses; hand hygiene should be practiced before and after using playground equipment.
Shared materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of shared materials permitted. Focus on regular hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, especially when regular cleaning not feasible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proper hand hygiene before and after touching/handling any shared materials/objects and spaces. High-touch equipment and shared materials should be cleaned regularly.
Shared spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permitted. When different cohorts interact in shared indoor spaces, masking and as much distance as possible should be maintained between cohorts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared indoor spaces should be used by one cohort at a time as much as possible; distancing maintained between cohorts if more than one using a shared space. Assigned seating (if applicable).
Cafeteria/lunch protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students may eat together outdoors without distancing. (regardless of cohort). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distancing as much as possible between cohorts while eating outdoors.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cafeterias: capacity limits should be established to enable 2 m distancing between cohorts, and as much distancing as possible within cohorts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distancing maintained between cohorts. Distancing maintained within cohorts while masks are removed for eating.
Assemblies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permitted. Follow relevant provincial requirements under Reopening Ontario Act. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No indoor assemblies, to be reassessed once case counts have a sustained decline for four weeks. See above for recommendations on use of shared spaces.
Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permitted. Self-screen and wear medical mask. School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular parent traffic (e.g. picking up children from classroom) not allowed.

	boards/schools must confirm self-screening of all visitors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discourage non-essential visitors. School nutrition program volunteers are considered essential visitors.
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permitted in areas with adequate ventilation. Singing permitted indoors. Masking encouraged but not required indoors if a minimum of 2m can be maintained between cohorts and as much distance as possible within cohort. Wind instruments permitted indoors within cohort if a minimum of 2m or more between individuals. As much distance as possible; use of large, well-ventilated spaces should be prioritized. Wind instruments permitted outdoors in mixed cohorts with distancing encouraged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singing indoors only permitted within cohort; masking required and distancing between individuals. Singing permitted outdoors with distancing maintained between cohorts; masking required if distancing not maintained between individuals within a cohort. Use of wind instruments permitted indoors only in well-ventilated spaces and if 2m distance (or preferably more) is maintained. Use of wind instruments permitted outdoors with distancing maintained between cohorts.
Physical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of gym, pools, change rooms, weight rooms, indoor PE equipment and shared outdoor equipment permitted with distancing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masking must be maintained when using gym, pools, change rooms, weight rooms, indoor PE equipment and shared outdoor equipment except upon entering a swimming pool.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-contact activities permitted indoors and outdoors. Masking not required when playing high or low contact activities outdoors. Masking encouraged for indoor sports where they can be worn safely based on the activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-contact and/or high-intensity physical activities permitted outdoors only, unless masking and/or distancing can be maintained. Low-contact activities permitted indoors, with masking and

		<p>distancing encouraged; masking required if distancing not maintained.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain attendance records.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School pools permitted, with distancing around pool area encouraged to discourage mixed-cohort congregating. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distancing of 2m must be maintained between cohorts while using pools and surrounding area.
Inter-school sports activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High and low-contact activities permitted outdoors without masking. • High and low-contact activities permitted indoors. Masking encouraged for indoor sports where they can be worn safely based on the activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If eligible, all participants should be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. • High-contact and/or high-intensity physical activities permitted outdoors only, unless masking and/or distancing can be maintained. • Low-contact activities permitted indoors, with masking and distancing encouraged; masking required if distancing not maintained. • Maintain attendance records.
Extra-curricular activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clubs, activities, sports teams, bands, other ECs are permitted. • Cohorts may interact outdoors with physical distancing encouraged, indoors with masking and appropriate physical distancing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masking required outdoors if distancing between cohorts not maintained, including outdoor sports where masks can be safely worn.
Inclement weather policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and policy required; consult with local public health unit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distancing maintained between cohorts; pivot to remote learning if distancing between cohorts unable to be maintained due to operational limitations (secondary to inclement weather).

Inter-provincial field trips	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strongly recommend only fully vaccinated students and staff participate in inter-provincial field trips (e.g. sports and music competitions).

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- **Definition of high-risk and high-contact sports:** A comprehensive list of these activities are not defined. Implementation of these recommendations would be facilitated by a provincially endorsed system for defining activities as high-risk or high-contact, such as that used by [OPHEA](#) during the 2020-2021 academic year.
- Schools may consider delaying resumption of non-curriculum sport activities (e.g. inter-school sport activities) while assessing the impact of school reopening on COVID-19 transmission.