



## Parkland School Division

### Supporting Students with Complex Needs

This protocol was originally written and developed by Vancouver Coastal Health in collaboration with the Fraser Health Authority and Langley School District in B.C. Parkland School Division has adapted to align this protocol to current Alberta Health Services guidelines to support PSD students with complex needs.

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## Background

Langley School District in BC, the Fraser Health Authority and later the Vancouver Coastal Health worked together to review and revise the following document: [Additional School and Childcare Safety Protocols for Working with Children with Complex Needs \(COVID-19\)](#) they report:

- COVID-19 virus has a very low infection rate in children estimated at 1-5% worldwide.
- The majority of cases in children are the result of a household transmission by droplet spread from another family member with symptoms of COVID-19.
- Children who are infected with the virus and develop COVID-19 have milder symptoms if any, and very few become critically ill.
- Children with COVID-19 illness typically have a fever, dry cough and fatigue. Some may also experience nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea.
- Unlike adults the rates of transmission are unknown.
- There is no conclusive evidence that children who are asymptomatic pose a risk to other children or to adults.
- There is no evidence indicating children of health care workers or other essential services workers are at increased risk of COVID-19 infection compared to other children
- Like adults, children with any common cold, influenza or COVID-19 like symptoms should stay home and isolate for 10 days following onset of symptoms and until symptoms resolve.
- More research is needed to fully characterize infection, transmission, and COVID-19 disease in children.

Given that it was written by education and health together, and there is not a document like this in Alberta that we know of, we have used it to create the following guidelines for PSD.

## Supporting Children with Complex Needs in an Educational Environment

Students identified with complex needs may require additional measures to ensure their safety during school re-entry. If a student requires specialized supports and services that require close contact with a teacher or educational assistant such as positioning, restraint, assistance with daily living skills (toileting, tube feeding), physiotherapy and/or occupational therapy strategies, communication, mobility or hand over hand instruction, additional guidelines should be followed. These guidelines include:

### Establish cleaning protocols for specialized equipment

- Specialized equipment refers to those items or apparel or equipment necessary for students to access either the educational environment or information presented or to support their medical needs. For example: weighted vest, standing frame, wheelchair, tube feeding, communication device, braces, FM systems etc.
- Students will not share their personal student supplies (i.e. students requiring toileting should each have their own wet wipes)
- Staff are required to have a detailed protocol in place clearly defining cleaning schedules for specialized equipment items
- Use the appropriate cleaning or disinfectant product for the piece of equipment that you are cleaning. If there needs to be instructions on how to clean a particular piece of equipment the instructions should be visible and accessible to staff.
- These items should not be shared with other students
- In those situations where staff members need to touch or manage specialized equipment they must ensure that they have sanitized their hands before and after touching the equipment.
- Equipment should be cleaned at the beginning and end of each day.
- Review the protocols of cleaning the equipment with all staff involved with the student, therapists and/or health care professionals involved and parents.

### Mandatory screening for staff and students (prior to participation in the educational environment)

- In some cases, but not all, students with complex needs have accompanying complex health needs. It is critical that staff working with these students follow the health guidelines in place regarding the completion of the daily screening questionnaire.
- Parents will use the screening questionnaire for their child daily and they do not have to submit it to the school

### Cohorts for staff and students

As much as possible, in those educational environments for students with complex needs, minimize the number of students and staff that they are interacting with.

## Physical Distancing

Physical distancing may not always be possible when working with children who have complex needs. It is important that we do what we can to try to assist children and staff to understand the importance of minimizing the frequency of physical contact with one another.

## Recommendations

- Avoid close greetings like hugs or handshakes; remind children to keep hands to themselves
- Help younger children learn about physical distancing by creating games. Older children can be provided age appropriate reading material and encouraged to self-regulate.
- Take children outside more often, perhaps breaking children into smaller groups
- Organize learning activities outside including snack time, play based learning, and play time.
- Regularly clean and sanitize items that are designed to be shared such as manipulatives or electronics
- Set up mini environments within the school to reduce number of children in a group
- Consider different classroom configurations to maintain distance between children (e.g. separating desks) or different locations in the school (e.g. gym or library, outside).
- Increase the space between children and staff during activities such as snack/lunch, i.e., move or separate tables, move chairs farther apart.
- Set up distinct areas for children who may have symptoms of illness until they can be picked up and ensure these areas are sanitized regularly.
- Consider staggering snack/lunch time to accommodate smaller groups/more space.
- Discourage any food or drink sharing.
- Use educational videos/online programs /social stories as a part of learning
- Encourage independent learning and distancing from each other.

## Personal protective equipment for staff (access to gloves, gowns and masks or shields)

- Working with students who have complex needs means that staff are navigating unprecedented territory without a clear end point which requires acts of self-kindness and self-preservation. Work together as a team and together develop self-safety-management plans for individual situations.
- Decisions regarding the use of personal protective equipment with/for students that have complex needs should be made on an individual student by student basis.
- The process for developing safety plans for individual students includes:
  - Identify team members that will develop plan (include parents or guardians and health care professional)
  - Determine student needs, potential barriers and challenges that need to be addressed when determining what protocols and safety measures need to be in place.
  - Individual student safety plans should include: whether or not student should wear a mask (based on circumstance) and the reason, whether or not staff should wear a mask or other PPE or in which circumstances and the reason. Include, based on circumstance specific health guidelines or protocols for an individual student based on input from a health professional.

- School administrators should develop a plan to ensure that students who are hearing impaired or may rely on facial cues are able to communicate with others in areas where non-medical face masks are being worn, or have their educational needs met when teachers are wearing non-medical masks in the classroom. This may include the use of transparent masks. As with other non-medical face masks, it is important that transparent masks cover the nose and mouth, as well as fit securely against the face.
- **Masks should not be worn by any student who is unable to remove the mask without assistance (ex. Due to age, ability or developmental status).**
- Follow the established health guidelines for care and disposal of non-medical masks.
- School staff should monitor for and address any discrimination or bullying associated with a student either wearing or not wearing a non-medical mask.
- Daily risk assessment of students and staff working within the educational environment is critical as wearing masks may not always be possible.
- The following link provides information and resources to support students with autism. These strategies and resources may also be helpful for other students identified with complex needs.
  - <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/sites/afirm.fpg.unc.edu/files/covid-resources/Supporting%20Individuals%20with%20Autism%20through%20Uncertain%20Times%20Full%20Packet.pdf>

## Behavior Support and Safety plans for students who spit, bite or require a hold

Children are screened case by case to determine levels of support required to safely bring students into the school environment and support and/or safety plans will be developed and provided to the school Principal. Staff working with children that have Behaviour Support Plans and/or Safety Plans in place should review these plans prior to working with the child.

### Students requiring holds

- Staff must be trained in proper procedure and technique prior to holding or restraining any student
- The school team will identify the staff member or members that will be involved in holding or restraining a student
- Protective equipment (such as mask or gloves) may be appropriate prior to contacting the student but due to circumstance this may not be possible and therefore staff identified for doing a hold or restraint be fully informed and agree. In those situations where the team identifies that restraining a child is a necessary support, the plan should outline which staff will restrain and based on the child what type of protective equipment, if any, will be worn.
- If there are no staff members willing to be involved in holding or restraining a student, the parents should be informed that in the case of an aggressive or violent incident the student may be sent home.

## Spitting Recommendations

- Although this behaviour is challenging, if the student is asymptomatic and healthy, the risk of transmission is low, especially if the behaviour is paired with handwashing and cleaning.
- Wipe down any area with saliva with approved sanitizer or disinfectant wipes.
- If in contact with saliva, wash hands and/or affected areas

## Biting Recommendations

- If in contact with saliva, wash hands and/or affected areas
  - If staff are concerned they may request Kevlar sleeves and/or other Kevlar products from Director of Student Services

## Toys and Other Items

- Keep enough toys out to encourage individual play.
- Items that may encourage group play in proximity or increase the risk of hand-to-hand contact such as playdough should be avoided.
- Try to limit toys and other items to those that can be easily cleaned.
- Like other respiratory viruses, there is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted via textbooks, paper, or other paper products. As such, there is no need to limit the distribution of books or paper based educational resources to students due to concerns about virus transmission.

## Visually Impaired Students

We understand re-entry during COVID is a momentous task for school boards, but we want to ensure that accommodations necessary for children coded with Blindness (46) or Visual Disability (56) do not get overlooked. We believe this can be done safely and successfully with proper planning and procedures in place.

With this low-incidence disability, re-entry presents a unique set of challenges. Students with vision loss rely heavily on touch to investigate and navigate their learning environments. After reviewing the current safety guidelines provided by the province, we have noticed the majority are visual in nature.

Here is a potential, but non-comprehensive, list of needs and challenges that our students could encounter:

- Sighted Guide especially for fire evacuations/lockdowns
- Trailing in the learning environment - using the hand to lightly follow along a surface (e.g., walls, lockers, desks, tables) for navigation
- Social distancing is challenging if not impossible with sight loss
- Education of school community on the challenges of social distancing with sight loss
- Educating sighted peers in how to assist safely and growth mindset to the challenges faced by peers with sight loss
- Safety when having peers and staff assisting our students
- Locating hand hygiene stations
- Following visual floor marking or designated entry or exit doors
- Early orientation for safety measures before re-entry
- Safety of students for recommended outside physical education
- Safety and navigation in high congestion areas such as locker rooms
- System in place for accessible equipment to be sent home in a timely manner to support learning due to zero sickness policy
- Sanitizing of accessible equipment

For example, with limited vision, following visual floor markings and designated entry and exit doors would be impossible. However, with orientation of these safety measures before classes resume, these same learners will be able to adapt and safely move through the school.

## **Keeping Parents/Caregivers Informed**

Keep parents and caregivers informed about what you are doing at your school to take extra precautions, be responsive to children. Be clear about your policy that children need to stay home if they are sick.

## **Cleaning and Sanitizing Recommendations**

### **Toys and Equipment**

Toys, surface, or other areas of the school which are used must be cleaned and sanitized. High touch surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a day. This includes:

- Toys in use
- Doorknobs and light switches
- Cupboard handles and handrails
- Phones and keyboards
- Tables
- Bathrooms
- Pet Cages (if high touch)
- Diaper stations should be cleaned and disinfected after every use.

## Cots and Related Equipment

- Clean and disinfect cots and mattresses prior to use and after they are used or soiled.
- Pillow cases and blankets are single use only and disposable (by design), therefore dispose immediately after single use.
- Use single use tissues and paper towel or towelettes and dispose accordingly
- Store linens in clean dry areas to prevent mould and mildew growth and keep them out of the way of everyday activities.

## Daily Living Skills Support

- Students with complex health needs may have personal care plans developed in conjunction with the parents and health care professionals outlining their personal care needs within the educational environment (examples include: toileting, G-tube feeding, positioning, transferring, administering medication, blood sugar monitoring etc.)
- The same protective equipment needed prior to COVID-19, such as masks, gloves and gowns, as identified and required by the health professionals should be in place to implement the personal care plan. No additional equipment is required unless identified on a case by case basis by the health care professionals.
- If you have questions with respect to an individual student contact the Director of Student Services, Leah Andrews 780 963-8421 as she can provide you some direction or contact information.

## Additional Resources

- Information for Schools & Educators (AHS)
  - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page2909.aspx>
- Covid-19 info for Albertans
  - <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx#goa-grid23425>
- Vancouver School Board
  - [Additional School and Childcare Safety Protocols for Working with Children with Complex Needs \(COVID-19\)](#)