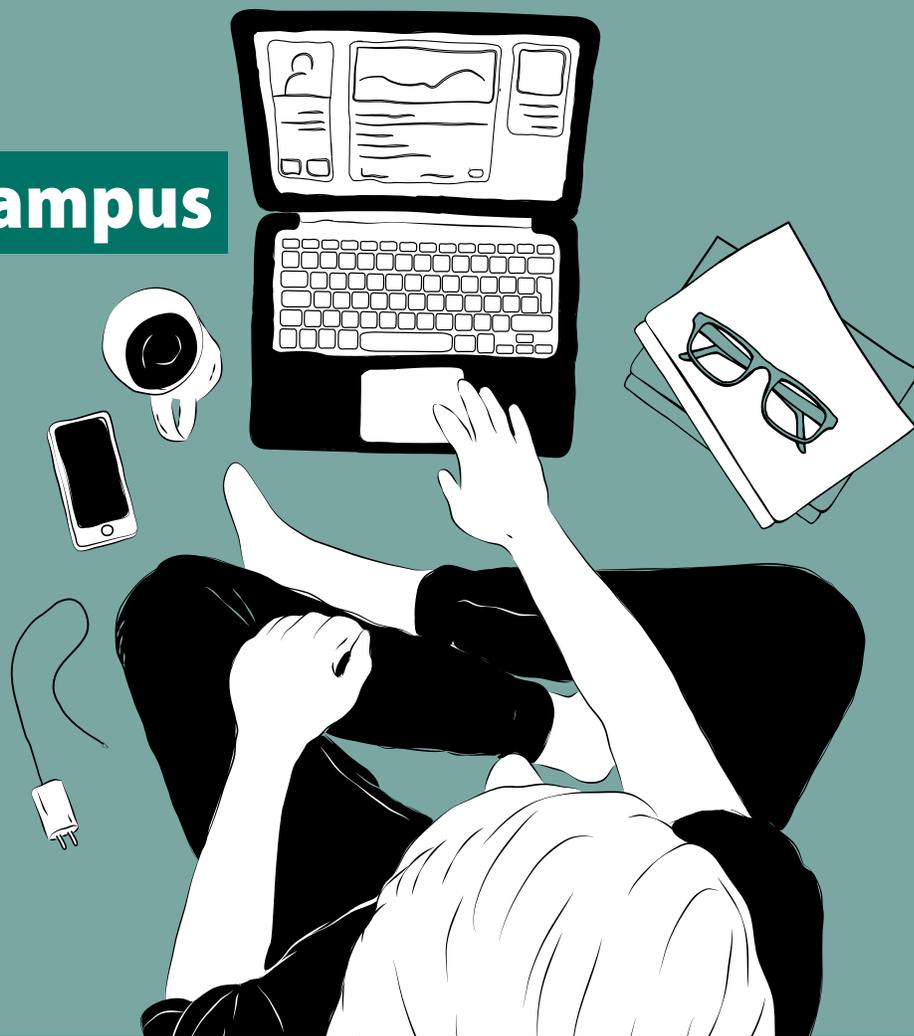


COVID-19

Return-to-Campus

Guidelines



March 22, 2022

Guidelines produced by
B.C. Post-Secondary Institutions
with the support of the Ministry of
Advanced Education and Skills Training

Amendment Log

The Return-to-Campus Guidelines are updated periodically, as necessary, to align with evolving guidance.

DATE	DESCRIPTION
March 22, 2022	<p>Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated: Repeal of Face Covering Order - March 10, 2022. Wearing masks in public indoor settings is not required by public health. Wearing a mask is a personal choice. Masks are encouraged on public transit and BC Ferries, but not required. Repeal of PHO Orders on Gatherings and Events – March 10, 2022. Repeal of PHO Orders on Food and Liquor Serving Premises – March 10, 2022. <p>New Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated guidance from the BCCDC - BCCDC Post-Secondary Public Health Guidance including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Prevention measures recommended by public health for post-secondary institutions in B.C. to reduce the risk of communicable diseases, including COVID-19, on campus. * COVID-19 is now managed like other respiratory illnesses. * Testing is available to eligible students, faculty or staff in BC based on the BCCDC testing guidance.
Jan. 28, 2022	<p>Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated: Contact tracing updates (including a definition of “close contact”) Updated: Mask updates and recommendations from the BCCDC. Updated: Attachment 2: BCCDC Guidelines <p>New Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 Rapid Testing for Post-Secondary Institutions: Distribution of the 500,000 kits. Business Continuity Planning and Workplace Safety Order Clarification: COVID-19 protocols have already been developed to address COVID-19 related risks, in close collaboration with staff from the PHO exempting PSIs from new Workplace Safety Order. COVID-19 Symptoms or a Positive COVID-19 Test: Self isolation and ending self isolation information from BCCDC. Attachment 4: January 2022 Guidance from BC’s Provincial Health Officer: PSI Safe Return to Campus
Dec. 22, 2021	<p>Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replaced Attachment 2 - BC CDC Guidelines with Dec 22 version updated to provide clarity on unimmunized individuals. Updated time limited terminology for consistency e.g., fall <p>New Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated Program-Specific Considerations Attachment 3: December 2021 Guidance from BC’s Provincial Health Officer: Rationale and recommendation to continue on-campus instruction for post-secondary institutions in January 2022.

Amendment Log *continued*

DATE	DESCRIPTION
Oct. 25, 2021	<p>Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Updated guidance from the BCCDC – Attachment 2: <u>BCCDC Return to Campus Public Health Guidance</u> including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>Updated contact tracing and notification guidance</u>. Note that the contact tracing and notification protocols previously outlined in Attachment 2 have been replaced with the new BCCDC guidance. ➤ BCCDC guidance that the benefit of <u>routine asymptomatic testing</u> diminishes as immunization rates increase. ■ <u>Updated Program Specific Considerations</u> for individuals in a health care location for training or research purposes.
Sept. 23, 2021	<p>Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Updated <u>PHO Orders on Gatherings and Events</u> – September 10, 2021. ■ Updated <u>Food and Liquor Serving Premises</u> – September 10, 2021: related to the <u>Proof of vaccination and the BC Vaccine Card</u>. ■ Updated post-secondary student housing based on PHO order <u>Post-secondary Institution Housing COVID-19 Preventive Measures</u> – September 9, 2021.
Sept. 3, 2021	<p>New Content:</p> <p><u>Attachment 3: New Return to Campus Public Health Guidance</u></p> <p>Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ B.C.'s Restart: A Plan to Bring Us Back Together – <u>Updated information on return-to-campus and step 4 alignment</u> and <u>Updated PHO information on implementing health additional measures</u> ■ Updated PHO proof of vaccination requirements information has been included in the following sections: <u>Moving Forward</u>, <u>Post-Secondary Examples of B.C.'s 4-Step Restart Plan</u>, <u>Campus logistics</u>, <u>Student housing and Dining Facilities</u>, and <u>Related Public Health Guidelines</u> ■ Updated PHO mask requirements information has been included in the following sections: <u>Post-Secondary Examples of B.C.'s 4-Step Restart Plan</u>, <u>Navigating Life with COVID-19</u>, <u>Core Public Health Measures and Campus Logistics</u>, <u>Post-Secondary Examples of B.C.'s 4-Step Restart Plan</u> and <u>Core Public Health Measures</u> ■ Moving Beyond COVID-19: Getting Back to Normal – <u>New Return to Campus Public Health Guidance</u> ■ Updated WorkSafeBC resource information on communicable disease prevention has been included in the following sections: <u>Core Public Health Measures</u> and <u>Transitioning to Communicable Disease Plans</u> ■ Program Specific Considerations - <u>New PHO vaccination requirement information</u>
July 5, 2021	Launch of the <u>COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Guidelines</u>

Contents

Amendment Log	ii	Indigenous Students (First Nations, Métis and Inuit)	8
Purpose of the Guidelines	1	Engaging with First Nations and Indigenous Communities	8
B.C.'s Restart: A Plan to Bring Us Back Together	1	First Nations Students Living on Reserve	8
Moving Forward	1	Community-based Programs	8
Post-Secondary Examples of B.C.'s 4-Step Restart Plan	2	Indigenous Gathering Places	8
Sector-Specific Guidance for Post secondary Institutions	3	Educational Activities	9
Navigating Life with COVID-19	3	Classroom Logistics	9
Core Public Health Measures	4	Student Supports / Accommodation	9
Working with Local Medical Health Officers	4	Mental Health Supports	9
Public Health Management of COVID-19	4	Program-Specific Considerations	10
Learning and Business Continuity	4	Acknowledgements	11
Safety is Everyone's Responsibility	5	Steering Committee	11
General Campus Planning	5	Panel of Experts	11
Campus Logistics	5	Public Health Partners	11
Cleaning and Hygiene	5	Reference Groups	12
Communicable Disease Plans	6	Attachment 1	13
Student Housing and Dining Facilities	6	March 2021 Guidance from BC's Provincial Health Officer	13
Faculty and Staff Considerations	6	Attachment 2	16
International Students	6	BCCDC Post-Secondary Public Health Guidance	16
Related Public Health Guidelines	7	Attachment 3	21
		December 2021 Guidance from BC's Provincial Health Officer	21
		Attachment 4	24
		January 2022 Guidance from BC's Provincial Health Officer: PSI Safe Return to Campus	24

Purpose of the Guidelines

The COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Guidelines (“the Guidelines”) provide updated public health guidance to support the full return to in-person education, research and on-campus services for B.C.’s post-secondary institutions. Both public and private post-secondary institutions, post-secondary sector stakeholders and the general public can utilize these Guidelines. The Guidelines were developed by a team of experts from B.C.’s post-secondary sector, the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, regional health authorities and the BC Centre for Disease Control.

B.C.’s Restart: A Plan to Bring Us Back Together

While the Return-to-Campus Guidelines align with [B.C.’s Restart Plan](#) launched on May 25, 2021 to bring British Columbians back together, the Provincial Health Officer has advised that the full return to in-person learning is not dependent on the province transitioning to Step 4 of the B.C.’s Restart Plan. The four-step plan is designed based on data and guidance from the BC Centre for Disease Control and B.C.’s Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry.

[Getting vaccinated](#) is the most important tool supporting the B.C. Restart Plan. In addition to the province-wide proof of [vaccination requirements](#), residents must be vaccinated to live in [post-secondary housing](#). Institutions seeking to introduce their own proof of vaccination policies are responsible for doing their own due diligence and working with public health. Public Health has advised that while institutions may consider a vaccination policy for employees, they are not supportive of proof of vaccination requirements for students participating in educational activities (e.g., classrooms, labs, tutorials etc.).

The return to campus was guided by data in four key areas:

- Declining COVID-19 case counts
- Increasing vaccination rate in people 18+
- Declining COVID-19 hospitalizations, including critical care
- Declining COVID-19 mortality rate

Moving Forward

PSIs transitioned from highly prescriptive COVID-19 specific orders and protocols back to more general institutional policies and guidance on occupational health and safety. This includes continuing to work with First Nations and

Indigenous community partners to meet the unique needs of Indigenous learners and communities.

As conditions evolved, most of the more restrictive public health measures affecting our personal and professional lives were relaxed and replaced with more general health-related behaviours for reducing the spread of viruses. This includes the rescinding of the Provincial State of Emergency and most public health orders.

Provincial restrictions on gatherings and events did not apply to educational settings. On campus instruction resumed with classrooms at full capacity with evidence-based or best practice prevention measures in place as recommended by public health. During the emergence of the Omicron variant, Public Health closely monitored the data, and strongly recommended B.C. to continue with on-campus instruction for post-secondary institutions in January 2022. The rationale and recommendations were provided in letters to PSI Presidents on December 20, 2021 and January 21, 2022 (see [Attachment 3](#) and [Attachment 4](#)).

The transition period between July 1, 2021 and September 7, 2021 was an important time for post-secondary institutions as they ramped up operations and welcomed back to campus faculty, staff and students. In alignment with public health guidance, post-secondary institutions began easing restrictions in workspaces and common areas, including the need for barriers or occupancy limits, during this transition period in order to be ready for the return to campus.

The following graphic was adapted to illustrate the progression over time to less prescriptive COVID-19 measures during the lead up and return to full campus activities.

Post-Secondary Examples of B.C.'s 2021 4-Step Restart Plan

NOTE: The table below provides post-secondary return to campus examples for the implementation of B.C.'s Restart Plan. The list is not exhaustive and provides examples only. The period between July 1 and September 7 was a transition period during which PSIs began easing COVID-19 restrictions in workspaces and common areas, based on up to date public health guidance.

Step	1 MAY 25	2 JUNE 15 (earliest date)	3 JULY 1 (earliest date) Transition Period	4 SEPT 7 (earliest date)
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks mandatory indoors Physical distancing If sick, stay home and get tested Daily health check Enhanced cleaning COVID-specific Safety Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks mandatory indoors Physical distancing If sick, stay home and get tested Daily health check Enhanced cleaning COVID-specific Safety Plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks indoor public spaces Careful social contact If sick, stay home and get tested Daily health check Enhanced cleaning New communicable disease plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Masks indoor public spaces If sick, stay home and get tested Daily health check Modified seasonal cleaning Communicable disease plans Proof of vaccination for specific activities
Educational Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily virtual Gradual increase face-to-face on-campus Building/room occupancy limits apply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily virtual Continued increase face-to-face on-campus Increasing building/room occupancy limits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued increase face-to-face on-campus Gradual reduction of COVID-specific restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily on-campus with student learning accommodations and support Maximum capacity for buildings/rooms
Offices / Workplaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily remote, limited return to campus Building/room occupancy limits apply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily remote, increased return to campus Increasing building/room occupancy limits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased return to campus Gradual reduction of COVID-specific restrictions New communicable disease plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully re-opened offices and workspaces w/ staff accommodations and support Communicable disease plans
Common Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector-specific restrictions remain in effect Crowding discouraged w/ controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sector-specific restrictions lessened Crowding discouraged but with lessened controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gradual elimination of COVID-specific restrictions Reduced crowd management measures New communicable disease plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All spaces fully reopened Communicable disease plans
Work / Organized Gatherings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily virtual Indoor: 10 or less Outdoor: 50 or less Building/room occupancy limits apply 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily virtual Indoor (seated) and Outdoor: 50 or less Sector consultation begin for large gatherings Increasing building/room occupancy limits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased indoor and outdoor gatherings capacity, with safety plans Gradual reduction of COVID-specific restrictions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full capacity allowed with increased or hybrid virtual options to continue (expected) Proof of vaccination for specific activities
Social / Personal Gatherings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor: 5 or less Outdoor: 10 or less Work with faith-leaders to bring back in-person worship services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximum 50 outdoor (e.g., sports spectators) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return to usual on indoor and outdoor personal gathering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normal social contact No indoor/outdoor spectator limits
Student Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small gatherings with friends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor: 5 or less Outdoor: 10 or less Organized student group meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor: 10 or less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student group/club meetings, with safety plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indoor: 50 or less Outdoor club/team sports (soccer, softball, volleyball, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yoga/dance/rehearsals etc., with safety plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased indoor capacity Increased spectator and events/orientations Bars/nightclubs with small group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normal social contact Sports events/concerts Pubs/bars and nightclubs Student group activities Events and parties Proof of vaccination for specific activities

Transition Period

Sector-Specific Guidance for Post-secondary Institutions

Protecting the health and well-being of students, faculty, staff and campus visitors remains the top priority, while being mindful of the importance of adaptability as conditions change. Post-secondary institutions have already demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability by quickly shifting to remote and hybrid learning in order to remain open and available for learners. While there are many lessons learned from this experience that can enhance opportunities for flexible teaching and learning moving forward, the focus of the Return-to-Campus Guidelines is on public health guidance.

Post-secondary institutions received sector-specific direction on March 8, 2021 from B.C.'s Provincial Health Officer, advising institutions to begin planning for a full return to on-campus teaching, learning and research in September 2021 (see [Attachment 1](#)). Dr. Henry stressed the importance of getting back on campus for everyone's [mental health and well-being](#). Additional guidance to help institutions prepare for a fall return to campus was provided in the *COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Primer* released on April 30, 2021. Following the release of the Primer, Dr. Henry participated in two town halls with [post-secondary administrators and labour organizations](#), and [student leaders](#) to discuss the preliminary public health guidance for September 2021. The public health guidance for B.C.'s post-secondary institutions is consistent with the guidance provided for all British Columbians.

With the emergence of more transmissible variants, it is important that we apply our understanding of where and how this virus is and is not transmitted in order to maintain an appropriate response. The previous move to online post-secondary education in 2020 and 2021 was associated with [significant negative consequences for post-secondary students](#), who reported significantly poorer and worsening mental health and greater negative economic impacts than other British Columbians. The recommendations of public health and Orders of the Provincial Health Officer are based on careful and ongoing assessment of the factors that increase risk and the interventions that are known to effectively reduce risk.

On December 21, 2021 public health experts in B.C. strongly recommended the continuation of on-campus instruction for post-secondary institutions in January 2022 (see [Attachment 3](#)). In the event that the recommendation should change, post-secondary institutions will be informed immediately.

Navigating Life with COVID-19

While elimination of the COVID-19 virus will not occur in the near future, we can take measures now to adapt to living with COVID-19 as we do with other manageable seasonal ailments such as influenza. Immunization, infection prevention, and exposure control measures are the tools we have to make everyone less vulnerable to getting COVID-19 or experiencing serious outcomes.

Based on guidance from the Provincial Health Officer and experience to date within B.C., environments such as post-secondary educational settings are low-risk sites for COVID-19 transmission.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 relies on everyone doing their part, including:

- 📺 immunization,
- 📺 daily self-administered health checks,
- 📺 staying home when sick,
- 📺 wearing [masks](#) when [advised](#) by public health, and
- 📺 practicing hand hygiene.

Authorized vaccines have proven to be highly effective at reducing serious outcomes from the COVID-19 virus. An additional booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is given months after an initial vaccine series to boost protection against infection. Positive effects are evident at the population level, reducing transmission in communities, decreasing serious outcomes of COVID-19, and thereby even protecting unvaccinated individuals.

While no single layer of protection against COVID-19 is perfect, when multiple layers of protection are combined, the risk of transmission is significantly reduced. Due to the demonstrated effect of B.C.'s immunization program, the layering of core public health measures, and the tailoring of prevention and control measures, physical distancing including the use of protective barriers, partitions, and directional signage will not be required in most settings, especially in educational environments such as post-secondary classrooms and instructional settings.

Core Public Health Measures

Core measures that are expected to remain in place, until otherwise determined by the Provincial Health Officer, include:

- ☑ Completing a daily self-administered health check and not attending campus when ill (NOTE: It is a personal responsibility for everyone accessing a post-secondary campus to complete a daily health self-assessment);
- ☑ Following handwashing and hygiene protocols;
- ☑ Maintaining [communicable disease prevention plans](#) inclusive of strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19. [WorkSafeBC guidance](#) is available;
- ☑ Following regular pre-COVID cleaning protocols in all indoor settings and on high touch surfaces; and,
- ☑ Adhering to the Provincial Health Officer [requirements](#) regarding the use of [masks](#). Where masks are not required by the PHO, wearing them is a personal choice.
- ☑ Following [proof of vaccination guidance](#) for discretionary events, activities or businesses identified under the Provincial Health Officer order.

Working with Local Medical Health Officers

Institutions should continue to work with their [local B.C. medical health officer](#) to develop effective infection prevention and exposure control measures, as well as COVID-19 case management and response processes.

Medical health officers in B.C. are responsible for monitoring and assessing the health status of the community, including making recommendations for strategies to address health issues and implementing immediate actions when necessary to protect the health of the public.

Public Health Management of COVID-19

Case and contact management were central to COVID-19 control in the absence of a vaccine. However, the public health approach to COVID-19 is evolving. While it is possible that COVID-19 contact tracing and notification protocols may still be required as part of the transition back to a more normal life, local medical health officers will guide public health approaches to COVID-19.

In the absence of a vaccine case and contact management were central to COVID-19 control. However, now with the implementation of COVID-19 vaccines, the public health use of contact tracing is of limited value at this stage in the pandemic. At this time, close contacts are not required to self-isolate or take any special measures. Local medical health officers will guide public health approaches to COVID-19 management. For more information on contact tracing and close contacts please refer to the BCCDC ["Close Contacts and Contact Tracing Page"](#).

Post-secondary Institutions are not responsible for contact tracing, and should not provide notifications to faculty, staff or students about potential or confirmed communicable diseases cases (including COVID-19) unless requested to do so by the local Medical Health Officer. For more information see Attachment 2 – [BCCDC Return to Campus Public Health Guidance](#).

Learning and Business Continuity

Public PSIs have Business Continuity Management (BCM) programs that include critical operational service delivery recovery strategies. Many program areas incorporate learning continuity strategies in case of a variety of disruptions such as classroom unavailability (reschedule class), extreme weather (teach online), and technology failure (mail-in assignments/paper copies).

PSIs have built on their BCM plans and incorporated COVID-19 learnings into their current communicable disease planning. As such, PSIs are exempt from the COVID-19 Safety Plan requirements in the [Work Place Safety Order](#) issued in January 2022 because detailed COVID-19 protocols have already been developed to address COVID-19 related risks, in close collaboration with staff from the PHO.

Safety is Everyone's Responsibility

We can all contribute personally and professionally by getting vaccinated (as we are able), following campus safety plans, performing our daily health check, staying home when sick, wearing masks as required, following handwashing and hygiene etiquette, and following public health guidance both on and off campus.

It is up to each one of us to do our part, but it is our collective efforts that will make the difference. This is the time to be kind, to be calm, and to be safe.

General Campus Planning

In addition to a comprehensive immunization program, a number of core public health measures and tailored infection prevention and control measures are expected to continue to support safe on-campus activities. The measures outlined below are guided by evidence and the expert advice of public health professionals.

Campus Logistics

- ❏ Daily self-administered health checks are a personal responsibility. Students, faculty, staff and campus visitors are not required to confirm that they have completed the health self-assessment prior to accessing campus. Individuals experiencing symptoms should stay home, consult the B.C. COVID-19 self-assessment tool to determine if COVID-19 testing is needed, and contact 811 or their healthcare provider for medical advice as necessary. If you have tested positive for COVID-19 or have symptoms please follow the [BCCDC Guidance](#) for ending isolation. When you end isolation, you are not considered contagious, however COVID-19 tests could come back positive weeks later.
- ❏ Institutions should continue to follow the advice of the Provincial Health Officer to ensure the campus community is aware of [any current requirements](#) and have a plan for communicating changes in recommendations.
- ❏ [By order of the Provincial Health Officer](#), proof of vaccination is required to access certain events, services and businesses on campus such as gyms, indoor ticketed concerts, and student housing.

- ❏ WorkSafeBC continues to advise that building ventilation systems, in good operating condition, do not contribute to the spread of COVID-19. Institutions should ensure that building ventilation (HVAC) systems are operating and maintained in accordance with WorkSafeBC requirements and relevant ASHRAE¹ Standards for indoor air quality.
- ❏ Institutions will not be required to manage the flow of pedestrian traffic within buildings or confined areas, or post occupancy limits for spaces such as elevators or washrooms.

Cleaning and Hygiene

- ❏ Hand hygiene should be actively promoted. Hand sanitization stations are recommended for placement at regular intervals throughout common spaces and at the entrances/exits to all public spaces.
- ❏ Educational and public spaces should be cleaned routinely. Increased disinfection and cleaning protocols for high touch areas such as door handles and elevator buttons are not required since surface transmission of COVID-19 is not a significant risk. Cleaning between classes is not required.

1 ASHRAE – the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers

Communicable Disease Plans

- ☑ Institutions are required to have communicable disease plans to reduce the risk of all respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19.
- ☑ Communicable disease plans should reference the core public health measures noted earlier including staying home when sick, hand hygiene, as well as any additional health and safety protocols prescribed by local and provincial medical health professionals.
- ☑ WorkSafeBC and public health experts have developed a guide to assist employers in developing their communicable disease plans.

Student Housing and Dining Facilities

- ☑ By Order of the Provincial Health Officer, all students, staff and faculty will need to provide proof of vaccination, via the BC Vaccine Card, to access certain discretionary non-essential activities, events and businesses on post-secondary campuses.
 - ➔ Post-secondary on-campus cafeterias do not require proof of vaccination.
- ☑ In addition, proof of vaccination will be required as a condition of living in post-secondary on-campus housing.
- ☑ Post-secondary institutions must be able to provide the medical health officer with the name and contact information for all residents in post-secondary housing, including a record of residents who have not provided proof of vaccination.
- ☑ On-campus student housing providers can plan for full or close-to-full occupancy for the fall. Institutions are strongly encouraged to hold back 1-2% of total student housing beds for the isolation or quarantine of students in the event of infection.
- ☑ It is anticipated that dining facilities for student housing and cafeterias serving students, faculty and staff at educational institutions will continue to be exempt from any provincial closures for restaurants and bars. On-campus cafeterias, restaurants and pubs should follow the provincial requirements for food and liquor serving premises.

Faculty and Staff Considerations

- ☑ Some faculty and staff may feel anxious or hesitant about being on campus. Employees should be clearly informed of new or updated workplace safety procedures, and how they are designed to protect faculty and staff from COVID-19 before returning to the workplace.
- ☑ All faculty and staff should follow institutional health and safety prevention measures which continue to be guided by public health.
- ☑ Institutions are strongly encouraged to administer formal requests for accommodation, including medical accommodation, based on the individual circumstances and in accordance with collective agreements, legal obligations and established accommodation review timelines.
- ☑ Faculty and staff are eligible to take up to three (3) hours without loss of pay to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Amendments to the *Employment Standards Act* provide this support for both doses and boosters of the vaccine.
- ☑ Faculty and staff absences may be higher than during pre-pandemic periods due to seasonal respiratory illnesses (flu-like symptoms), ongoing self-assessment and self-isolation requirements. While community transmission is expected, employees may need to take time off or work from home if diagnosed with COVID-19, or advised to self-isolate or quarantine. Workers may be eligible for up to 5 days of paid leave under the *Employment Standards Act* if they need to **stay home** because of COVID-19. The BC *Employment Standards Act* paid COVID-19 leave program was updated January 1, 2022. If you have tested positive for COVID-19 or have symptoms please follow the BCCDC Guidance for ending isolation. When you end isolation, you are unlikely to be contagious, however COVID-19 tests could come back positive weeks later.

International Students

- ☑ The Canadian border is open to international students; however, some federal travel restrictions may remain in place. It is anticipated that students entering Canada to study will continue to be permitted entry if they are attending an institution that is on the federal list of approved Designated Learning Institutions managed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. These students will be required to continue following federal requirements in place at the time of entry into Canada.

Related Public Health Guidelines

- For guidelines that relate to other aspects of campus operations beyond the delivery of post-secondary education and training, the post-secondary sector will continue to rely on public health guidelines developed and updated for other sectors (e.g., competitive sports, use of athletic and recreational facilities, public transit, travel, retail services, etc.).
- Institutions should continue to work with their local medical health officers for campus-specific questions, local / regional public health guidance.
- COVID-19 vaccines are available at no charge to everyone ages 12+ living, working or studying in B.C. during the pandemic. You do not need a Personal Health Number (PHN), B.C. Services card, or to be enrolled in B.C.'s Medical Services Plan to get the vaccine. However, all students are encouraged to obtain a PHN in order to use the provincial on-line vaccination booking system. Students can call 1-833-838-2323 to obtain a PHN number and [register](#) to book into a local ImmunizeBC vaccination clinic.
- Students that have been vaccinated against COVID-19 outside of Canada may still need to receive vaccinations here. Students are encouraged to submit their COVID-19 vaccine record to [B.C.'s immunization registry](#).
- All students are eligible to receive the vaccine, including international students and their families. The COVID-19 vaccine will not be mandatory but proof of vaccination may be a requirement for some specific programs. However, ImmunizeBC highly recommends getting the vaccine.

- Rapid point-of-care screening for COVID-19 is being used by B.C. Health Authorities for COVID-19 testing in settings with increased risk of transmission and/or outbreaks. Point-of-care testing for COVID-19 is available to post-secondary institutions that meet the requirements outlined in B.C.'s [Rapid Point of Care Testing Strategy](#). Institutions interested in rapid COVID-19 point-of-care tests can contact their local medical health officer and email RapidPOCTeam@phsa.ca for an intake assessment.
- Over 2 million rapid tests were provided to PSIs in the winter term as a part of the allocations announced by the Province in January 2022. These [rapid tests](#) are available as an optional, time-limited initiative for post-secondary institutions for testing of symptomatic employees and students. The tests are a self-management tool intended to support the continuity of on-campus learning, instruction and research. Additional information on public health measures, including vaccinations and public health case management, is available in the [BCCDC Return to Campus Public Health Guidance](#). The routine screening of people without symptoms (i.e., asymptomatic screening) is not recommended by public health outside of specific settings such as student housing. Employees and students should only use the rapid test if they have symptoms of COVID-19. Individuals who test negative should be instructed to return to classes when they feel well enough to resume regular activities.
- Routine asymptomatic testing of unimmunized students had been proposed by some institutions to further reduce the likelihood of transmission on campus. The benefit of this intervention diminishes as immunization rate increases. Based on a review of literature, local modeling, the benefit of routine asymptomatic screening of unimmunized students and staff is limited when immunization coverage is 80% and vanishingly small at 90%. It is recommended that those with symptoms should continue to follow BCCDC guidance on when to [get tested](#). If you are considering using point-of-care tests for asymptomatic screening of unvaccinated students, faculty and staff, consult your local Medical Health Officer prior to implementation to ensure appropriate guidelines are followed.

Indigenous Students (First Nations, Métis and Inuit)

Engaging with First Nations and Indigenous Communities

Indigenous people have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and may face elevated health risks linked to social determinants (e.g. income, culture, access to health services, etc.). As such, they may maintain increased safety measures, and experience heightened anxiety related to COVID-19.

- Indigenous students may be experiencing increased racism related to the pandemic, including regarding the prioritization of Indigenous people for vaccination. Institutions should continue to work with students, faculty and staff to create culturally safe and inclusive campus communities free of racism.
- Institutions should continue to work collaboratively with local First Nations and Indigenous community partners to ensure that the health and safety of Indigenous learners and communities are taken into account.

First Nations Students Living on Reserve

- While much of the province will be significantly easing restrictions, due to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Indigenous people, First Nations may be maintaining increased safety measures, including states of emergency that keep communities closed. First Nations have the authority to make these decisions. This means that some students may not be able to attend in-person classes.
- In the spirit of Reconciliation and consistent with the [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#), institutions should work with local First Nations and any students that are impacted by the closure of their communities to ensure access to academic programming and services.

Community-based Programs

- Many institutions partner with other organizations to deliver post-secondary programs in community settings, including Indigenous communities and institutes. Institutions are encouraged to work with community-based partners to:
 - Jointly develop plans for safely resuming or continuing program delivery.
 - Determine whether additional supports are required for learners who face barriers to remote learning, such as lack of technology or online literacy.
- Institutions, faculty and staff should work with Indigenous community partners to understand and respect the health and safety precautions of the community.

Indigenous Gathering Places

- Indigenous Gathering Places provide important supports for Indigenous students. Institutions should work with local First Nations, Indigenous community partners, and Indigenous students to develop plans to safely operate Gathering Places and provide cultural supports for Indigenous students.
- Given that Indigenous communities may be taking increased precautions, including the closure of some First Nations, involvement of communities and elders may be impacted. Institutions should work with Indigenous partners and elders to develop plans for services and activities to be carried out safely, such as using technology.
- Institutions may also consider consulting the First Nations Health Authority for the latest guidance on providing services and supports for Indigenous people.

Educational Activities

- Experience over the last year has shown that educational activities supporting teaching, learning, research, and student development are low-risk sites for COVID-19 transmission including activities in classrooms, lecture theatres, libraries, studios, workshops, labs, field schools, practicums, research settings, etc.
- Educational activities associated with orientation events are encouraged, but they might look different based on public health advice on gatherings. Non-educational or social activities throughout the year should be planned according to the prevailing public health guidance.

Classroom Logistics

- The Provincial Health Officer has indicated that there are no limits on the number of participants for in-class educational activities. Classes can be scheduled without physical distancing requirements (e.g. a classroom with 30 seats can be scheduled with 30 students; a lecture theatre with 150 seats can be scheduled with 150 students).
- Adhere to the Provincial Health Officer [requirements](#) regarding the use of non-medical masks. While mask wearing continues to be a personal choice some educational settings may continue to require face coverings.

Student Supports / Accommodation

- Institutions are strongly encouraged to follow established accommodation or academic concession mechanisms to ensure that students who cannot physically be on campus (e.g., they are ill, adhering to quarantine rules, self-isolating, attending a vaccine appointment, etc.) are not disadvantaged in their educational pursuits.
- Institutions are strongly encouraged to ensure that students with disabilities are supported and can continue their educational pursuits with appropriate academic accommodation.
- Institutions are encouraged to work collaboratively with student societies, clubs and governments to positively reinforce COVID-safe behaviours both on and off campus.

Mental Health Supports

- Students, faculty and staff may be anxious or experiencing increased stress about returning to campus. Mental health supports are critical for everyone's health and wellbeing as part of in-person activities on campus. Communication plans should be in place to raise awareness of these supports including:
 - [Here2Talk](#), a free and confidential 24/7 mental-health counselling and referral service, and the new [Capacity to Connect program](#) which provides faculty and staff at post-secondary institutions with easy access to the tools and skills they need to provide intervention and help for students who are struggling with their mental health and wellness.
 - The [Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention](#) (CASP) provides information and resources to communities to reduce the suicide rate and minimize the harmful consequences of suicidal behaviour.
 - [KUU-US crisis response service](#), a culturally-aware crisis support is available 24/7 to Indigenous people in B.C.
 - [Mental Health and Wellness Support](#) resources are available through BCcampus.
 - Faculty and staff can access counselling and wellness services through employee and family assistance programs.
 - [Virtual mental health programs and services](#) are offered through the Province to support mental health and wellness.
 - [Let's Talk About Suicide: Raising Awareness and Supporting Students](#) is a facilitator's guide to working with faculty and staff through detailed training on suicide awareness and response in a sensitive and respectful way.
- Campus resources may include spirituality and wellness centres including:
 - Counselling departments with trained counsellors who are available to students for career, educational, personal and crisis counselling.
 - Wellness centres offering one-to-one health and wellness planning.
 - Multifaith centres, chaplaincy and/or on-campus pastoral care providing one-on-one pastoral/spiritual counselling, and communal gatherings to support health and well-being.

Program-Specific Considerations

- Students and instructors will be expected to follow guidelines for specific settings where work integrated learning placements occur, including clinical, teaching, internships, co-op placements, and other community engaged work placements. Institutions should be knowledgeable of program-specific COVID-19 guidance and ensure that student and instructor risk is minimized in these placements.
- Vaccines are **required** for programs that have been identified in the [COVID-19 Vaccination Status Information and Preventive Measures Order](#).
- A student, faculty member, researcher or staff member of a post-secondary institution who is in a health care location for training or research purposes must follow the Hospital and Community ([Health Care and Other Services](#)) [COVID-19 Vaccination Status Information and Preventive Measures Order](#).
- A post-secondary institution (PSI) must request proof of vaccination, or an exemption, from each person in a care location for training, certification, equipment assembly, research or associated administrative purposes.
- For the purpose of recording a student's vaccination status, a PSI may collect information from the HSPnet database, and may enter this information into the [HSPnet database](#). For more information please see [HSPnet FAQ](#).
- Institutions, students, faculty and staff should adhere to the federal government's [Travel Advice and Advisories](#) when considering studying or working abroad.

On-Campus Health Services / Working with Local Public Health

- Institutions can play a key role by liaising with local public health officials to ensure students, including out-of-province students as well as international students and their families, have the most current information about the availability of vaccines.
- Institutions should work with their local medical health officer within their Regional Health Authority regarding on-campus COVID-19 vaccination clinics.
- Institutions should identify and communicate steps that students, faculty and staff should take if they develop symptoms, including where to access testing.
- Public health authorities are responsible for determining notification processes and requirements for confirmed cases of COVID-19. Institutions may be asked to assist public health authorities in notifying close contacts, assisting in the identification of people who may have been exposed, distribution of materials prepared by the public health authorities, or supporting public notification efforts.

Acknowledgements

The Return-to-Campus Guidelines were developed by experts from the BC post-secondary sector, in partnership with public health experts. Special thanks to members of the Go-forward Guidelines Steering Committee, Panel of Experts, public health partners and reference groups.

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Attachment 1

March 2021 Guidance from BC's Provincial Health Officer



1190387

March 8, 2021

Dear Post-Secondary Institution Presidents:

I am writing to you to acknowledge the important leadership the post-secondary sector has shown in BC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the past 12 months, and to support you with the critical goal of resuming safe on-campus teaching, learning and research in September 2021.

Your institutions worked in partnership with the BC Centre for Disease Control, WorkSafeBC, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training, and staff in my office to produce and update the "COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.'s Post-Secondary Sector." Those Guidelines and your institutional health and safety plans helped the sector to be very successful in mitigating the spread of COVID-19. The quick adaptation to remote learning, while staying open and available for learners, played a major role in the success of B.C.'s pandemic response.

My office and our medical health officers share your concerns about the wellbeing of young adults who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, including worsening mental health, increased financial instability and diminished future prospects. We also acknowledge this has been a difficult and stressful time for faculty and staff. It is imperative to get back on campus for everyone's health and well-being.

There are very good reasons to be confident that a return to on-campus instruction in the fall can be undertaken safely and successfully. Current projections of the COVID-19 vaccine supply in BC suggest that all vulnerable and high-risk groups should be immunized this spring, and the majority of the adult population by the summer. Young adults aged 18-24 should receive the vaccine no later than the end of July, but more likely sooner. The timing of immunization should not be a determinant of planning for a return to on-campus activities.

Given the expected timelines for immunization it is essential that we plan for a full return to in-person activities on campus in September 2021, including in-person instruction, with faculty and staff returning to campus sooner. Immunization will support what seems likely to become stable coexistence with COVID-19 as another manageable, seasonal ailment.

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New variants of the SARS CoV-2 virus will likely continue to emerge. We will respond to them through monitoring, re-formulation of tests and vaccines, and through other measures as needed depending on the characteristics of the variants. Targeted testing and contact tracing by health authorities will remain key supplements to immunization in rapidly controlling transmission. These activities will be part of normal, ongoing life with COVID-19.

We have also learned over the past year that when we implement effective safety plans, large sectors can operate safely. Reducing the opportunity for infectious contacts will continue to be an important strategy. As such, safety plans will remain important, with updates as required. My team looks forward to working with you to fine-tune plans for the prevention activities we have all become so familiar with: self-administered health checks; facilitating hand cleaning through access to soap and water or encouraging people to use hand sanitizers; use of masks; early detection and rapid testing of potential cases; isolation; and case and contact management.

The experience of the past year can help with a safe return to post-secondary campuses. Above and beyond immunization, infectious contacts in group settings at post-secondary institutions can be reduced through a variety of prevention and exposure control measures. Two-meter physical distancing has been my guidance for uncontrolled group settings. Such distancing is neither practical, nor necessary, in the controlled context of post-secondary instructional settings. I am very confident that the combination of immunization and continued application of the “COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.’s Post-Secondary Sector” will support the safe and complete resumption of campus teaching, learning, and research.

We also believe student housing, dining and other on-campus student services will be able to return to normal or close-to-normal capacities by following revised protocols in the “COVID-19 Go-Forward Guidelines for B.C.’s Post-Secondary Sector.”

Based on what we have learned in the past year, and the important protection that immunization will provide, I, as well as the medical health officers in British Columbia, strongly support the resumption of on-campus activities in September 2021. Public health will also continue to work with post-secondary institutions to determine if measures are needed to keep activities inside and outside the classroom safe in the fall, such as public transportation, socializing outside of class, athletics, and arrival and quarantine of international students.

Thank you, again, for the important role you play in supporting the provincial COVID-19 response, and in helping British Columbians to realize the full experience and benefits of post-secondary education. I look forward to working with you to strengthen the collaboration between public health and post-secondary institutions for a full and safe return to on-campus instruction in September 2021. We all look forward to the rich campus interactions that will make learning and personal development so much more effective and supportive for students, faculty, and staff.

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Sincerely,



Bonnie Henry
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer

Cc Honourable Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Shannon Baskerville, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Max Blouw, President Research Universities' Council of BC
Ruth Wittenberg President, BC Association of Institutes and Universities
Colin Ewart, President BC Colleges
Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health
Chief Medical Health Officers, Regional Health Authorities
Chief Medical Officer, First Nations Health Authority
Deputy Provincial Health Officers

Attachment 2

BCCDC Post-Secondary Public Health Guidance



Post-Secondary Public Health Guidance

UPDATED: March 18, 2022

Key Messages

- This document outlines the prevention measures recommended by public health for post-secondary institutions in B.C. to reduce the risk of communicable diseases, including COVID-19, on campus.
- Educational settings are low-risk settings for COVID-19 transmission, particularly in the context of a highly immunized population.
- Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 on campus. Everyone eligible is strongly encouraged to be vaccinated against COVID-19.
- COVID-19 is now managed like other respiratory illnesses.
- Given the low-risk nature of in-class learning, a highly immunized population, and significant social benefits of in-person instruction, on-campus instruction is strongly recommended.

Introduction

This document outlines the prevention measures recommended by public health for post-secondary institutions in B.C. to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It aligns with, and is complementary to, the [COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Guidelines](#).

In B.C., most transmission of COVID-19 occurs in households or at informal social gatherings. In educational and other comparable settings, including those with teaching, learning, research, and student development activities, COVID-19 transmission is uncommon. Young people have been [disproportionately affected by the pandemic](#). Enabling them to engage in regular learning, recreational, and social activities is needed for pandemic recovery. While COVID-19 will continue to circulate for many years, in a highly immunized population like B.C., COVID-19 prevention needs to be balanced with recovery efforts.

The prevention measures detailed in this document have been very effective at reducing the spread of COVID-19 in a wide variety of settings across B.C. and will support successful and low-risk on-campus activities. Prior to implementing measures in addition to those outlined below, consult with your local Medical Health Officer to maximize benefits and avoid harms.

Post-secondary institutions are encouraged to transition to these recommended prevention measures in a planned manner, recognizing this as an evolving situation with multiple steps necessary to support implementation. Public Health

remains committed to supporting the post-secondary sector, including faculty, staff, and students to engage in educational and research activities that are critical to the community and to society.

Personal Measures

COVID-19 is now managed more like other respiratory illnesses. This means that if you develop symptoms, please stay home until you are well enough to participate in usual activities or call 8-1-1 to determine if you should seek additional medical attention or treatment when you are unwell.

Stay Home When Sick: Ensure students, faculty and staff are aware they should stay at home until well enough to resume regular activities. See details on [BCCDC website](#) for more information on how to manage your illness.

Get Tested When Recommended: Encourage students faculty and staff to use the [BC Self-Assessment Tool](#) app and the BCCDC [When to Get Tested](#) resource.

Hand Hygiene: Enable regular opportunities for hand hygiene, including placing hand sanitizer stations at the entrances/exits to public indoor spaces.

Vaccination

Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of serious illness from COVID-19. A primary series of vaccination provides [effective protection](#) against serious illness from COVID-19, including [variants of concern](#). A booster dose enhances protection. Vaccines are available to all faculty, students, and staff, including international students and their families.

Post-secondary institutions can work with public health to ensure vaccination opportunities remain accessible, as well as promote information on [how to get vaccinated](#). The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has specific information on getting vaccinated for [students arriving in B.C.](#) from within and outside of Canada.

People vaccinated outside of B.C. can upload their COVID-19 vaccination records to www.immunizationrecord.gov.bc.ca. This requires a B.C. [Personal Health Number](#), which can be obtained by contacting Service BC at 1-833-838-2323. Service BC is available seven days a week, 7am to 7pm.

Some experiential learning placements (including practicum and co-op placements) may require students to be vaccinated in line with practices for other employees. This includes health sciences students working in certain health care settings by Order of the Provincial Health Officer.



Testing, Isolation, and Treatment

Testing: Testing is available to eligible student, faculty or staff in BC based on the BCCDC testing guidance. Share guidance on [when to get tested](#) with the campus community. Testing locations are available on Regional Health Authority websites. Public health does not recommend routine asymptomatic testing.

Resources to help faculty, staff, and student understand test results and determine next steps are available on the [BCCDC website](#). Those who have [symptoms](#) consistent with COVID-19 and are not tested are advised to stay home until they no longer have a fever and feel well enough to return to their usual activities. Rapid antigen tests are available for those who wish to use them, but are not required for in-person campus operations.

Treatment: Treatment options for those who are at high risk of severe disease are available, and more pharmaceutical interventions are expected to become available. For more information, see [BCCDC website](#) or consult your health care provider.

Contact Tracing: Contact tracing is no longer an effective public health intervention for control of COVID-19 in the community. Public health continues to follow COVID-19 cases in high-risk settings such as health care settings and long-term care facilities.

Administrator Role: Post-secondary institutions are not responsible for contact tracing, and should not provide notifications to faculty, staff or students about potential or confirmed communicable diseases cases (including COVID-19) unless requested to do so by the local Medical Health Officer.

Should faculty, staff or students disclose that they have tested positive for COVID-19 or bring forward concerns related to unconfirmed cases on campus, administrators may consider the following key messages if they determine the need to address their campus community:

- We continue to prioritize the safety and wellbeing of our students, faculty and staff. Effective prevention measures are in place across campus to prevent COVID-19 from spreading.
- Educational settings are low-risk settings for COVID-19, particularly in the context of a highly immunized population.
- In most cases, public health notifications to the campus community will not be required.
- Please do not notify faculty, staff or students about potential or confirmed communicable disease cases (including COVID-19) unless requested to do so by the local Medical Health Officer.
- In the interim, continue to do your daily health checks and follow all of the prevention measures in the communicable disease prevention plan for each institution.
- [Getting vaccinated](#) is the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



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BC Centre for Disease Control

If you have fever, a new cough, or are
having difficulty breathing, call 8-1-1.



Provincial Health Officer Orders

Post-secondary institutions must follow applicable Provincial Health Officer Orders. Full details on Orders are available from the [Provincial Health Officer](#). Current Orders applicable to post-secondary institutions include:

Post-secondary Institution Housing COVID-19 Preventive Measures: Those [living in on-campus housing must provide proof of vaccination](#), indicating they have received all recommended doses or combination of World Health Organization approved vaccines. Those who are unvaccinated are required to wear a face covering (mask) in any area of housing other than their room. This order is scheduled to expire April 8, 2022.

Gatherings & Events Order: Certain types of [gatherings and events in B.C.](#), including those on post-secondary campuses, must follow directions under the Gathering and Events Order (i.e. proof of vaccination checking)

Gathering & Events / [Food and Liquor Serving Premises Orders](#) - Proof of Vaccination: Everyone on campus aged 12 and older (born in 2010 or earlier) needs to provide [proof of vaccination](#) via the BC Vaccine Card to access some **non-essential or discretionary** services, businesses, and events on campus. Examples of non-essential or discretionary services include, but are not limited to:

- Indoor ticketed concerts, theatre, dance, symphony and sporting events
- Indoor and outdoor dining at restaurants, pubs and bars (on-campus cafeterias are excluded)
- Indoor adult sports activities and group exercise
- Indoor organized gatherings like conferences, conventions and workshops
- Indoor organized group recreational classes and activities like pottery and art

These orders are scheduled to expire April 8, 2022.

Face Coverings (COVID-19) Order – Indoor Public Spaces: Public health orders do not require face coverings in public spaces. The use of face coverings is a personal choice. More detailed information about various types of masks and how to use them is available on the [BCCDC website](#).

Regional Recommendations & Orders: Medical Health Officers can place local public health Orders or recommendations for additional prevention measures beyond this guidance for post-secondary institutions within their regional health authority. These are placed at their own discretion, based on their authority under provincial legislation. These may be put in place during times of increased community transmission of COVID-19, and within communities with low vaccination uptake. They are based on local epidemiology and are proportional to risk.

Environmental Measures

Ventilation: Continue to ensure that all mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are designed, operated and maintained in accordance with WorkSafeBC requirements and ASHRAE Standards for indoor air



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quality, and that they are working properly. Open windows when the weather permits if it doesn't impact the functioning of the ventilation systems.

Cleaning & Disinfection: Clean and disinfect educational spaces, public spaces and high-touch areas daily. Environmental cleaning is not required between classes.

Administrative Measures

COVID-19 specific administrative measures are no longer required.

Post-Secondary Campus Guidance

March 18, 2022



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BC Centre for Disease Control

If you have fever, a new cough, or are
having difficulty breathing, call 8-1-1.



Attachment 3



December 2021 Guidance from BC's Provincial Health Officer

1217020

December 21, 2021

Dear Post-Secondary Institution Presidents:

I am grateful for the close cooperation and communication between Public Health and post-secondary institutions, which has effectively limited the risk of COVID-19 to students, faculty and staff on campus and supported ongoing post-secondary operations during the fall academic term.

With the recent emergence of a new, more transmissible variant, it is important that we apply our understanding of where and how this virus is and is not transmitted to maintain an appropriate public health response. We will continue to implement introduce effective preventive measures and will do our best to avoid ineffective measures that may cause significant disruption and adversely affect health and wellbeing.

At this time, public health experts in B.C. strongly recommend continuation of on-campus instruction for post-secondary institutions in January 2022. Public health continues to monitor Covid-19 to ensure that safety measures are informed by evolving evidence. In the event that the recommendations need to change, the PHO will discuss with post-secondary institutions immediately. However given the importance of maintaining in person and on campus education of post secondary students, Public Health Leadership will work with post secondary institutions to provide guidance, support and assistance to ensure that students are able to continue learning in place.

Rationale:

- To date, our experience with all variants of concern reflects similar patterns of risk: high risk settings being homes and unstructured or informal social settings; and low risk settings being educational settings, including large classrooms, and workplaces with safety measures in place.
- Based on our experience in B.C. and internationally, educational settings are low-risk for COVID-19 transmission. Transmission in educational settings on campus continues to be uncommon. When a post-secondary student or employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19, the exposure is typically found to be associated with a social setting; they have not generated forward transmission in the classroom or office environment. The

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high level of responsible behaviour in post-secondary communities (almost all are vaccinated and mask wearing compliance is high) helps to prevent forward transmission.

- With every variant, including the Omicron variant, transmission has been observed to occur in households and unstructured social settings. There is no evidence that moving to online post-secondary instruction will decrease such interactions, noting that students would spend fewer hours in structured settings, which have a lower risk for transmission.
- Since structured educational settings do not amplify transmission, a move to online instruction is not an effective means of reducing COVID-19 among students, faculty, and staff, or in the wider community.
- The previous move to online post-secondary education in 2020 and 2021 was associated with [significant negative consequences for post-secondary students](#), who reported significantly poorer and worsening mental health and greater negative economic impacts than other British Columbians.
- The recommendations of public health and Orders of the Provincial Health Officer are based on careful and ongoing assessment of the factors that increase risk and the interventions that are known to effectively reduce risk.
- It is becoming increasingly clear that the virus will become endemic and continue to circulate in our community. New variants will continue to emerge and we will need to monitor the impact on the population and deploy necessary prevention measures as appropriate.

With new variants, our preventive approach should remain consistent with evidence-based approaches to control endemic diseases. Moving to online instruction can be harmful as it is not an effective means of reducing transmission, may result in increased time in higher risk settings, and be detrimental to the mental health and wellbeing of students.

Recommendations:

- Maintain in-person instruction on post secondary campuses and ensure students continue to have in-person access to their instructors.
- Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 on campus. Everyone eligible is strongly encouraged to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. It is noteworthy that the post-secondary community has heeded the call and is amongst the most vaccinated populations in the world.
- The prevention measures detailed in the [Return-to-Campus Guidelines](#) and the respective institutional safety plans have been very effective at preventing COVID-19 in a wide variety of post-secondary settings across B.C. and are expected to support a successful return to campus in January. Prior to implementing measures in addition to those outlined below, please consult with your local Medical Health Officer.
- Decreases in structured gatherings such as in-person instruction can be accompanied by increases in unstructured or informal gatherings where risk of transmission is higher.

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- Non-educational post-secondary gatherings are events that bring staff and students together outside of regular educational activities. In times of higher transmission, these activities may be cancelled or postponed in consultation with the local Medical Health Officer.
- If in-person non-educational gatherings must be limited, seek virtual alternatives whenever possible, and continue to comply with the [PHO Order for Gatherings and Events](#).
- Please ensure that students are aware of recommendations for daily self-assessment and testing and have information about testing options.
- Institutions should continue to work with their local Medical Health Officers to identify and respond to outbreaks.
- Follow regional public health recommendations and provincial public health orders. When recommendations and Orders change, please review your campus safety guidance, and update as necessary.

Again, public health will continue to monitor COVID-19 and remain actively engaged with post-secondary institutions to make new recommendations, if and when they become necessary. I thank you for your leadership and commitment to the health and wellbeing of your campus communities.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Henry
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer

Cc Honorable Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Shannon Baskerville, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
Max Blouw, President Research Universities' Council of BC
Ruth Wittenberg President, BC Association of Institutes and Universities
Colin Ewart, President BC Colleges
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Chief Medical Officer, First Nations Health Authority
Deputy Provincial Health Officers

January 2022 Guidance from BC's Provincial Health Officer: PSI Safe Return to Campus

1219189

January 21, 2022

Dear Post-Secondary Institution Presidents:

Thank you for your continued collaboration with Public Health for a safe return to campus this winter. I appreciate the challenging circumstances many of you are navigating and I commend you for addressing the educational needs of students as well as safety and business continuity considerations at your institutions. As we have discussed, it remains important that we continue to guide our pandemic response based on the epidemiology of SARS-CoV2 and to balance the risk of COVID with the negative impacts of public health measures.

Our [post-secondary guidance](#) reflects this need to implement effective prevention measures and avoid ineffective measures that provide little health benefit, and may cause significant disruption as well as adversely affect health and well-being. The rapid spread of the Omicron variant to become dominant in BC was associated with changes in the epidemiology including a shorter incubation period. At the same time, this variant is associated with a significantly reduced risk of serious illness and hospitalization particularly in people vaccinated with two doses of vaccine. Much, however, remains the same in terms of risk settings and measures to prevent spread and we continue to see lower risk in structured seated settings. Given as well the disproportionate adverse impacts of the pandemic on our young adults in the context of a highly vaccinated population, I urge you to prioritize on-campus instruction whenever possible.

Our advice strongly recommending the continuation of on-campus instruction at post-secondary institutions is rooted in the goals of pandemic response, which are to reduce serious illness and death, protect the health care system and minimize societal disruption. Vaccination continues to be proven to be the single most effective intervention for reducing the burden of illness related to COVID-19. Epidemiological data from BC shows that being unvaccinated is the strongest risk factor for severe illness requiring hospitalization or critical care. We see an impressive 27-fold reduction in rates of critical care admissions in the fully vaccinated compared to the unvaccinated populations. Analyses of BC's hospitalization data further demonstrate that the vast majority of the post-secondary community, including faculty and staff, are at a very low risk of hospitalization due to COVID-19.

We continue to see lower rates of COVID-19 incidence in the post-secondary population, and this reflects the high vaccination rates and comprehensive safety measures in place. In contrast to the controlled nature of classrooms and offices, SARS-CoV-2 transmits most efficiently in homes and unstructured or informal social settings. Public Health investigation has found that when a post-secondary student or employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19, the exposure was most often associated with their home or social setting, and they have not generated forward transmission in the classroom or office environment. Indeed, spending fewer hours in structured settings may paradoxically increase time spent in unstructured settings

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Ministry of Health

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that are at higher risk of transmission. Therefore, we recommend that non-educational and social gatherings that bring staff and students together outside of educational activities follow current public health guidance.

The vast majority of post-secondary students and staff have stepped up and received their vaccinations. While transmission can occur in any setting, high immunization rates and sector-wide measures such as masking in the post-secondary communities have enabled a lower risk environment in support of in-person instruction. The primary concern with the Omicron variant is the potential for faculty, staff, and students to be absent for short periods of time due to illness. Therefore, it is important for your institutions to periodically review and update your business continuity plans.

Limiting on-campus instruction, on the other hand, has been associated with [significant negative consequences for post-secondary students](#), who reported significantly poorer and worsening mental health outcomes and greater negative impacts than other British Columbians. Students and families are concerned about missing out on enriching experiences of post-secondary education. Indeed, many are distressed during this key developmental stage in their lives.

The experience post-secondary institutions across BC have with successfully returning to on campus learning in the fall of 2021 should guide our return in 2022 and indeed 17 institutions have resumed on campus learning already. We have the tools to effectively manage cases and outbreaks of COVID-19 if and when they occur and to continue to provide the essential educational and research experiences that students, staff and faculty need.

Public health remains committed to providing evidence-informed advice to manage COVID-19. We expect that COVID-19 will transition from a pandemic to an endemic state over the coming months. Our epidemiological data shows that we are past the peak of the current wave in terms of community transmission, and hospitalizations are plateauing. New variants will undoubtedly emerge as SARS-CoV-2 continues to circulate globally. We will continue to monitor for emerging evidence and continue to offer a preventive approach that supports the best public health outcomes for students, staff, and faculty. I encourage you to promote vaccination and other prevention measures outlined in the [COVID-19 Return-to-Campus Guidelines](#) as well as your institutional communicable disease prevention plan among your faculty, staff, and students. These measures have been effective at preventing COVID-19 in a wide variety of post-secondary settings and will continue to support successful on-campus instruction.

Thank you again for the ongoing collaboration with Public Health and your efforts to enable on-campus education. I am grateful for the tremendous contribution from your membership to the economic, social, and cultural well-being of our province, and the health and wellbeing of our young generation in particular.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Henry
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer

Cc Honourable Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
 Shannon Baskerville, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training
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 Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health
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