

# Guidance for preventing illness

## A message from the Superintendent of Schools

Having safe and healthy school environments is a responsibility we all share and contribute to. This year, we have experienced a more typical return to teaching and learning, while continuing to implement protocols that mitigate the spread of illness.

Over the past two years, Edmonton Public Schools has implemented multiple safety protocols that work together to support learning environments that are as healthy and safe as possible for staff and students.

Our goal is to maintain in person learning and the vibrancy of this environment as much as possible. We will do this together through our shared commitment to the well-being of students and staff. This document outlines the health and safety measures that remain in place for the 2022–23 school year.

These protocols are proactive and responsive, and are based on lessons learned during the pandemic and ongoing information and guidance from health officials related to mitigating the risk and spread of illness.

The health and safety of students and staff is our top priority and we remain committed to creating learning and working environments that keep everyone as safe as possible. Thank you for your continued partnership and support in this work.



Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

We all have a part to play in keeping one another safe.

For the 2022–23 school year, Edmonton Public Schools is keeping health and safety protocols in place that help to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and other viruses. The measures that are in place are meant to work together to protect students and staff.

## Masks

Though masks are a personal choice, Alberta Health Services states, “Wearing a mask is a tool to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. Wearing a mask can help reduce your risk of infection and help protect people from being exposed to your germs.” The use of masks in school and worksites is encouraged, though individual choices about whether to wear a mask will be respected.

Schools have masks on hand for staff or students who forget a mask, but want to wear one. Students can pick one up at the office.

## Staying home when sick

One of the most effective ways to keep one another healthy and safe is to stay home when sick. Families, students and staff are asked to monitor for symptoms of illness before coming to school and work. If you’re feeling unwell, please stay home. Thank you for continuing to report your child’s absence to the school. When reporting your child’s illness, please consider sharing symptoms they are experiencing, whether they have tested positive for COVID-19 or any other relevant information.

## Cleaning and disinfecting

Schools and worksites continue to follow COVID-19 cleaning guidelines. This includes:

- Frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces like handrails, door handles and water fountains
- Use of hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes for shared equipment

## Hand hygiene

Students and staff are encouraged to wash or sanitize their hands throughout the day, including:

- When entering the school/worksite
- Before eating
- Whenever they are using shared equipment

Schools have hand sanitizer at entrances and other commonly accessed areas, such as the library, main office and cafeteria.

## Sick room

Schools continue to have a designated sick room for students or staff who develop symptoms of illness while at school. Students who show symptoms of illness will be sent to the sick room and their parent/guardian will be contacted to make arrangements for the student to go home. Students in the sick room are encouraged to wear a mask while they wait to be picked up.

## Air quality

Throughout the pandemic, the Division has taken a number of steps to support air quality, which include:

- increasing the frequency of filter changes
- extending the operational times our systems run from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.
- maximizing fresh-air intake
- increasing inspections of the systems
- installing the highest quality filter as possible for each system (including MERV-13 filters wherever possible)
- providing portable air filtration (HEPA) units for every classroom and learning space in the Division, to enhance protection against the spread of viruses
  - HEPA filters will be turned on when students and staff are in the room
  - the Division follows the manufacturers' recommendations in replacing the filters in the units

## Monitoring rates of illness

Edmonton Public Schools is committed to sharing information about illness and absences with our community. You can find overall [daily Division illness data and information](#) school-by-school on [epsb.ca](#). This also includes self-reported cases of COVID-19.

If a school is seeing a sharp increase in rates of illness, parents/guardians will receive a letter from the school, letting them know about proactive measures they're taking to mitigate the spread of illness.

## Moving to online learning

The Division is taking all steps possible to maintain in-person learning. There may be cases where a temporary transition to online learning is required due to operational challenges. If your child is required to transition to online learning due to operational challenges, the school will communicate directly with families with further details and information.

## School gatherings

When a school is seeing an increase in the number of students away due to illness, they may consider shifting large-scale gatherings to an online format, or postponing the event until illness rates decrease.

## Guide for outbreaks

In September, Alberta Health Services (AHS) released the [Guide for Outbreak Prevention and Control in Schools](#), which outlines how the health authority would address outbreaks for the 2022–23 school year. Edmonton Public Schools works closely with AHS to report school absence rates that reach 10 per cent or higher. If Alberta Health Services (AHS) determines the school has an outbreak (respiratory, gastrointestinal, etc.), a letter will be provided to families. Schools declared on outbreak status will follow all AHS recommendations around school operations and activities while on outbreak.