

# Students who need specialized supports

*The start of the school year can bring mixed emotions, from excitement to uneasiness. Families of students with special needs may feel especially concerned about returning to school this fall.*

School will look different this year, as we work together to keep children and staff as safe as possible.

Protecting each other is a shared responsibility, and we all have a role in keeping students, staff and our school communities as safe as possible. Families are encouraged to read their school's re-entry strategy to learn about how their school and the Division are supporting high-quality in-person and online learning. Visit your school's website to read the school re-entry strategy or view the [A-Z list of schools on our Division website](#) and select your school.

Our information about specialized supports for students builds on those strategies to help families understand what to expect during in-person learning as we focus on mitigating risks during the pandemic.

## Before school starts

### Getting ready for school

School staff will review students' Individual Program Plans before school begins. Staff will then work with families during the first weeks of school to make any adjustments needed. Schools will also support families who choose online learning to develop plans for students who remain at home.

Schools are taking other steps to help families and students prepare for the return to school. That may include:

- A virtual or in-person meeting so you can learn more about safety strategies and ask questions about how we are addressing your child's specific needs. Your teacher may also reach out to you before school starts to help your child learn about new routines and expectations.

- Staggered start dates. In many schools, students start classes on staggered days before the whole class attends together. Your school will reach out to you about which days your child should come to school.
- Providing your family with a "social story" specific to your child's school. This could include photographs of staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), information about where to enter and exit the school, handwashing instructions and physical distancing routines. This story can be shared with your child at home to help them understand what to expect at school.

### Individual support

Students who require specialized self-help support and/or in-school medical care (such as toileting, feeding transferring, catheterization, G-tube maintenance, respiratory procedures, prescription medication or behavioural intervention) may be in close physical contact with school staff who are assigned to their care.

School staff administering specialized support who cannot maintain physical distance are required to wear personal protective equipment. School staff will follow COVID-19 protocols in alignment with Alberta Health Services requirements, Occupational Health and Safety obligations, and the Edmonton Public Schools COVID-19 Division Re-Entry Strategy.

Please speak to your school if you want more information about any of the guidelines. Specific COVID-19 strategies and safety information will be added to:

- Individual Program Plans (IPP)
- Medication Management Plans (MMP)
- Individual Behaviour Support Plans (IBSP)

### Keeping everyone safe

#### Screening protocol

Before sending your child to school every day, please complete the provincial [COVID-19 Screening Questionnaire](#). If your child has any symptoms, they must stay home.

#### Pre-existing conditions

Any student with a pre-existing health condition that causes symptoms of illness should be tested for COVID-19 at least once before they return to school. A negative test would help show that their symptoms are related to their pre-existing condition, and not to an illness. This would establish what their baseline for being healthy looks like. Families should notify their school about any pre-existing condition and the symptoms it causes. As long as these symptoms remain the same, the student can attend school. If symptoms change or worsen, the student will need to leave the school, follow illness protocols and have another COVID-19 test to determine if the symptoms are still related to the pre-existing medical condition. If the test is negative, the student may return to school. Families can [learn more about COVID-19 testing and book a test online](#) through Alberta Health Services.

#### What happens if your child is ill

You should work with your school to develop a plan in case your child becomes ill at school. As part of that plan, you may consider specialized transportation and identifying people who can administer medical procedures. If your child becomes ill, you will be required to pick them up immediately.

#### Masks

All students from Grades 4–12 are required to wear a mask while at school. The Division encourages students in Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 3 to wear one as well, if they are able to do so.

If you feel your child is physically, psychologically or developmentally unable to wear a mask, or if they cannot wear one for reasons under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, please speak with your school.

You can work with your school on a plan for mask use that might also be included in your child's individual learner support plan(s), which could include an IPP, MMP, and/or IBSP.

#### Physical distancing

Physical distancing will not be possible in all of our classrooms. Staff working in classrooms may need to assist children with certain tasks, provide support for their emotional well-being or their self-care needs.

When physical distancing cannot be maintained, school staff will wear personal protective equipment, including a mask, to follow Alberta Health Services directions, Occupational Health and Safety requirements and the Edmonton Public Schools COVID-19 Division Re-entry Strategy.

#### Cleaning and disinfecting

The Division has created clear cleaning and disinfecting guidelines that all schools must follow. Additional guidelines must be followed when working with students with complex needs:

- Equipment used by multiple students, such as change tables, hospital beds, positioning chairs and iPads, must be wiped thoroughly with a medical-grade disinfectant wipe after each use. Cloth or soft materials must be laundered after each use.
- All sensory room equipment must be cleaned and disinfected after any student uses it.
- Equipment assigned to a student (slings, towels, blankets, bibs, etc.) will be stored in an individual bin and will be laundered regularly.
  - Personal items like extra clothes, chewies, fidgets, visual cards, diapers/Pull-Ups must be kept separate and clearly labeled.
- Staff who touch equipment such as wheelchairs or slings will sanitize their hands before and after handling equipment. The equipment will also be wiped and cleaned frequently.
- Technology like iPads will need to be wiped after each use. Students and staff who use the iPads must sanitize their hands before and after use.
- Non-essential personal items should remain at home.

### Additional supports

#### Proactive behaviour support

Students returning to in-person learning need a welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy learning environment. To help all students feel as safe and calm as possible, our staff will use proactive, non-restrictive measures, effective behaviour management and build positive relationships from the start.

Some of the methods we will use include:

- Familiar activities and predictable routines to reinforce safety and security.
- Visual supports in the classroom to help establish routines.
- Regular reviews of all individual plans, with updates as necessary to include proven strategies in those plans.

#### Managing high-risk behaviours

Proactive measures are the first course of action. However, some students may require additional supports if their behaviour becomes dysregulated, to keep both the student and staff safe.

The school—in partnership with families—will develop crisis-response strategies in case they are needed. These strategies will be detailed in the student's Individual Behaviour Support Plan.

#### Assessments for students who need specialized supports

Students will continue to receive the specialized supports they need, including speech language pathology, occupational therapy, psychological support, physical therapy and support from educational assistants.

Any staff who work with your child will take precautions, including wearing a mask. Staff may also choose to wear a face shield.

### Getting to school

Before the first day, schools will develop transportation plans for students who need specialized supports and services:

- Specific loading and unloading procedures will help students with special education needs arrive safely at their classroom, while adhering to all safety protocols.
- Educational assistants who ride the yellow bus with students will be required to wear a mask on the bus and may wear additional PPE as required.

The bus will be cleaned before each trip and in between any cohorts (groups of students and staff who remain together).

Families are encouraged to consider getting their children to and from school if they are not comfortable with their child riding on a yellow bus with other children.

### Family choice—online learning

We understand that returning to in-person classes is not the right decision for every family. Families will be able to decide, at four key times throughout the school year, whether their child will attend classes in-person at school, or learn at home through online instruction.

If you choose online learning, your child will be part of an online learning group with an assigned teacher. Programming that supports your child's IPP will be provided, but we are unable to provide in-person support at home.

The learning format will include live online teacher instruction and developmentally appropriate activities to support your child's IPP. If you choose online learning, schools will work with you to identify what learning strategies have been effective to date, how to best provide resources and schedule online sessions based on the student's needs. All activities will be structured around the student's IPP/IBSP and the grade level of programming the student is working at.

Our online environment will use Google Meets and Google Classrooms to connect students with classroom activities as well as individualized programming.

Schools will continue to connect with the school-linked specialized support team to discuss additional supports and services that might benefit your child, like speech and language interventions or any other modifications needed to support learning in the online environment.

### Educational assistant support

Educational assistant (EA) supports will be available for online instruction, under the direction of the teacher. For example, an EA may support specific IPP strategies, working alongside the caregiver and student. EAs will also assist online teachers with preparing materials for use during online instruction, and could lead small group or individual activities such as math games, reading stories, phonological awareness strategies and scribing.

You can learn more about online learning and resources for teachers to use with students through [Learn Alberta](#).

**If you are interested in this option, please sign in to SchoolZone\* to make your choice by the end of day on Friday, August 21.**

*\*Families without access to SchoolZone should email their selection to their school with their child's name and grade by Friday, August 21.*

### Resources for families

If you have questions about programming for your child, please contact your school.

These additional resources can help you prepare your child for a return to school during COVID-19.

- [Alberta Education: Parents' Guide to 2020–21 School Year](#) will help you understand your role in reducing the risk of COVID-19 in schools
- View the Alberta Education video: [Returning to School Safely](#)