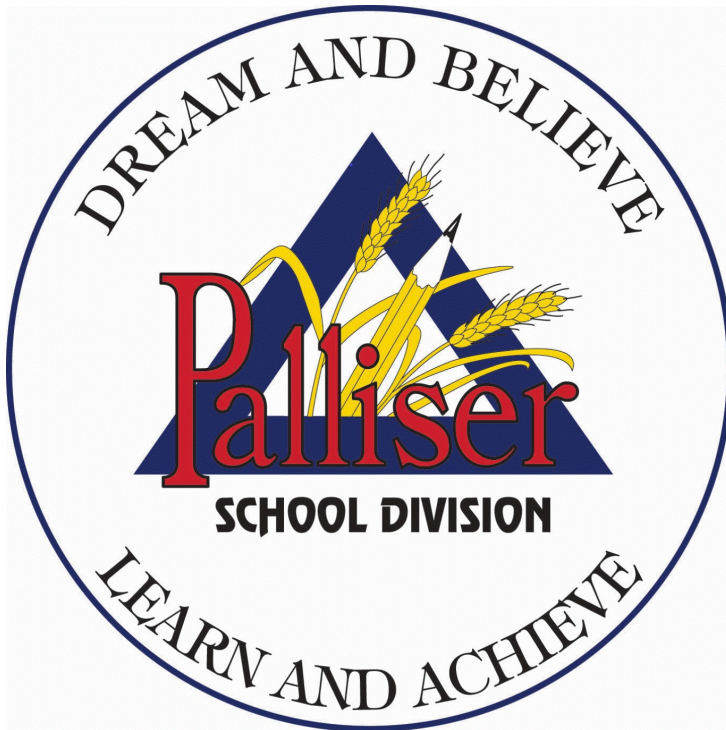


Palliser School Division COVID-19 School Guidance



Updated:

Message from the Superintendent

August 20, 2021

It is my pleasure to provide you with information regarding Palliser School Divisions re-entry plan for the 2020-21 school year. On August 13, 2021, Jason Kenney, Premier, Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Education, and Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's Chief Medical Health Officer announced that with the availability of vaccines, in-person classes would resume under scenario 1, which is a complete return to school with health and safety measures in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Palliser School Division values its partnerships with our many stakeholders. The current pandemic makes our work more complex, but this work remains more important than ever. This re-entry plan was developed in consultation with school principals, directors and senior administration, our Board of Trustees, Alberta Education and Alberta Health Services. We have taken into consideration the large and diverse geographical space that the Palliser School Division represents. With this mind, individual schools have been given latitude to use their discretion within certain parameters as it relates to the guidelines.

We will continue to focus on the following three key strategies and ask all of our stakeholders to work together to familiarize themselves with them to help minimize the transmission of COVID-19 within our schools and division. The three strategies are:

- Following expert advice;
- Keep the virus out and;
- Prevent the spread

The safety of staff and students remains our foremost concern, therefore we will continue to heed expert advice. We have set September 27, 2021 as a date to review this plan which coincides with the Chief Medical Officer of Health's scheduled update on the existing masking mandate for transportation. The safety of our students and staff remains our foremost concern. We recognize that our plan must be flexible and we remain responsive to the direction and guidance of Alberta Education and Alberta Health.

Thank you for your ongoing support, effort and determination during this challenging time in our lives.

Sincerely,

Dave Driscoll, Superintendent

Palliser School Division Three Key Strategies

Palliser School Division will emphasize three key strategies to minimize the risk of transmitting COVID-19 within our school communities and division. The three key strategies are:

- **Follow Expert Advice** – It is an expectation that we all become knowledgeable about the protocols, guidelines, recommendations and directives for school re-entry from Alberta Education and Alberta Health Services.
- **Keep The Virus Out** – The first and most important action that we can take is to prevent anyone that is ill or has COVID-19 symptoms from entering schools, division owned facilities or getting on our division buses.
- **Prevent The Spread** – In addition, we must take steps to reduce the possibility of transmission from someone who is ill, has COVID-19 symptoms or is asymptomatic but able to spread the virus.

If we can follow these three strategies and apply sound professional judgement, we will greatly decrease the likelihood of transmitting the virus within our schools and throughout the division. ***These strategies apply to the three operational scenarios Alberta Education has provided and may be modified at any time depending on the following three scenarios:***

- **Scenario 1:** In-school classes resume (near normal with health measures)
- **Scenario 2:** In-school classes partially resume (with additional health measures)
- **Scenario 3:** At-home learning continues (in-school classes are suspended/cancelled)

Follow Expert Advice

The first step in minimizing the transmission of COVID-19 is to become knowledgeable about, and follow directives and guidance from Alberta Education, Alberta Health Services, and Chief Medical Officer of Health. The contents within this document and our COVID-19 response may change based on guidance from the government or the school division. Schools leaders and employees must use sound professional judgement when applying these protocols to their unique context. Ultimately, we must act reasonably and prudently to ensure the safety of all stakeholders in the division.

Information from the Government of Alberta is continually updated on the webpages in the links below. ***Importantly, mandatory health measures implemented by the Province of Alberta that are routinely changed may not reflect immediately in this guidance document and school re-entry documents, therefore it is important to understand the most recent [enhanced public health measures](#).***

Links to Alberta COVID Guidance Documents

[Alberta.ca/returntoschool](https://alberta.ca/returntoschool) includes a main page for parents, students, and school staff on essential health measures to reduce transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.

- [Guidance for Respiratory Illness Prevention and Management in Schools](#) (see: Appendix B)
- [2021-2022 School Year Plan](#)
- [2021-2022 Parent Guide](#)

Keep The Virus Out

The next step (and likely the most important) is preventing the virus from getting into our schools, division facilities or on a division operated bus. Therefore, anyone that is ill or has COVID-19 symptoms will not be permitted to enter schools, division owned facilities or get on a division operated bus.

Please note, the items listed below may change from time to time based on guidance from the government or the school division. Schools leaders and employees must use sound professional judgement when applying these protocols to their unique context. Ultimately, we must act reasonably and prudently to ensure the safety of all stakeholders in the division.

Staying home when sick

Before leaving home, any student, staff, or visitor must continue to screen for symptoms using the [Alberta Health Daily Checklist](#). There is a checklist for students and children under 18 and a checklist for adults 18 and older. Anyone that exhibits and/or reports COVID-19 symptoms must stay home and is encouraged to get tested. We will never be able to guarantee that our schools and division will be COVID-19 free. However, we believe that if the division, schools, individual employees, individual students, parents and school communities work together we can minimize the possibility of exposure and continue to ensure our schools and facilities are safe for everyone. Specific information on isolation requirements for symptoms can be found at the Alberta webpage for [Isolation and Quarantine Requirements](#).

Responding to illness

Schools will have a plan in place if a student or staff member develops symptoms of illness while at school, including sending home students or staff who are sick where possible, or having a separate area for students and staff who are sick and waiting to go home.

Prevent the Spread

Cleaning

Schools will ensure regular cleaning and disinfection. Difficult to clean furniture will continue to be prohibited in schools.

Hygiene and respiratory etiquette

Schools will continue measures to promote frequent hand washing/sanitizing and good respiratory etiquette. Further details on practices that encourage hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette are detailed in the [Guidance for Respiratory Illness Prevention and Management in Schools](#).

Physical distancing

Schools will continue protocols to reduce crowding and support physical distancing between all students/staff in areas inside of the schools where masks are not used. This may include staggering start and end times for classes, posting signs and marking floors with arrows to control the flow of traffic, and removing seating in public areas to prevent gathering.

Cohorting

Schools are recommended to create cohorts of students during indoor student learning and indoor extra-curricular activities, where possible, particularly for students who are unable to be vaccinated (Kindergarten to Grade 6). Cohorts may include more than one class but should be limited to students of the same grade. Cohorting may also be eased in outdoor settings.

Non-medical Face Masks

Masks are not necessary in areas where schools have reduced crowding. Masks may be removed while in class or while outside. Schools will support students and parents or guardians that choose to wear masks. Masks are to be worn for all students, staff and visitors, in high-traffic areas where schools cannot effectively reduce the number of individuals through school routines (i.e. staggering recess and bell times).

School Activities

There are no restrictions on curricular and extracurricular activities below. In some instances, additional health measures will be recommended or required to ensure the safety of students and staff. These activities also are subject to changes based on current health restrictions or requirements from the school division. Updates to the status of specific activities are outlined on [Alberta.ca/returntoschool](https://alberta.ca/returntoschool) and [current health restrictions](#).

- Field trips and student transportation (with applicable masking requirements)
- Sports and Athletics
- Music, singing, dance, and theatre
- Work experience

- Food services
- Ceremonies (any ceremonies should ensure reduced crowding and appropriate physical distancing).
- International student programs
- Visitors to the school (visitors and volunteers may attend schools by appointment only and will continue to be required to complete the Alberta Health Daily Checklist and sign in)

Student Transportation

Each bus will provide hand sanitizer for drivers and students. Students will be offered a squirt of hand sanitizer when they board the buses and we encourage that they use it unless they have sensitivities to the sanitizer.

Currently, all individuals utilizing Palliser School Division transportation are required to wear masks.

Vaccinations

Immunizations will be available through temporary clinics in schools for students in Grades 7 to 12 as well as teachers and staff, starting on September 7.

Students, teachers and staff can receive whichever dose they are eligible for in school at this time. However, if they receive their first dose at the in-school clinic, they will need to book their second dose at a local pharmacy or Alberta Health Services (AHS) clinic when it is time to do so.

Students under 18 will not be vaccinated in schools without parent or guardian consent. Parent or guardian consent will be required through consent forms.

Mental Health and Wellness Supports for Staff and Families

Palliser School Division supports students through a comprehensive wellness goal. We recognize that mental health and wellbeing is tied to academic and personal success, and as such are committed to providing mental health supports to our students and families. By focusing on a comprehensive continuum of support, we will continue to be responsive to the needs of students, staff, and families within our division. For more information around supporting positive mental health and/or impacts of COVID-19, please see:

- [Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan](#)
- [Homewood Health Employee & Family Assistance](#)
- [Wellness Supports](#)
- [Alberta COVID-19 Youth Mental Health Resource Hub](#)
- [Student Learning Hub – in particular, Mental Health Supports for Parents, Guardians and Families](#)

Alberta Government Health and Supports for Staff and Students

- Alberta Health Services

- [Help in Tough Times](#)
- [Healthy Together](#)
- *Mental Health Helpline: phone 1-877-303-2642*
- *Health Link - phone 811*
- alberta.ca/COVID-19 info for Albertans;

Other Information

For any general inquiries regarding where to find specific information that may not be in our Palliser COVID-19 Guidance, please contact Noorin Chatur-Muhammad: noorin.chatur.muhammad@pallisersd.ab.ca You can also find some additional information and resources in the links below.

Frequently Asked Questions

Health Measures

Q: Can a cohort of students share common items?

A: Yes. However, there are some critical considerations for teachers such as ensuring hand-hygiene for students and that hands are cleaned before and after use.

Q: How can we protect those who are not yet eligible for vaccination?

A: Data has shown that the most important thing that can be done to protect the health and safety of those at risk is vaccination. Promoting and maintaining good public health practices such as staying home when sick, good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette will reduce the risk of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. Students, parents/guardians, staff and visitors are encouraged to assess their personal risk factors and/or the risk factors for their families and take precautions that make sense in their situations. This may include wearing a mask in certain settings, keeping your social circle small, or leaving space between yourself and others in group settings. Schools should support these personal choices, whenever possible.

Responding to Illness

Q: What are the expectations for close contacts in schools?

A: AHS is no longer identifying or following up with individual close contacts, and quarantine for close contacts is no longer mandatory. All individuals, including those who may be informed that they are close contacts, are asked to routinely monitor for symptoms, stay home and seek testing if they are feeling unwell. [Please follow AHS guidelines.](#)

Vaccinations

Q: Who is eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in school?

A: Eligible students in Grades 7 to 12, who are born in 2009 or earlier, if appropriate parent/guardian consent is provided. If a student is in a grade level lower than Grade 7 but meets the age requirement of having been born in 2009 or earlier, they may be immunized if appropriate parent/guardian consent is provided. School staff are eligible to receive vaccines in school.

The current vaccine program planned for schools will start the week of September 7 and run until about October 15.

Q: Can schools ask students and staff about their COVID-19 immunization status?

A: It is important to note that the decision to be vaccinated is a personal choice, and the decision made by parents/guardians for their children is private. In accordance with Alberta's privacy legislation, the Personal Information Protection Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, staff must respect the health privacy of students, including their vaccination status.

Q: Who can parents/guardians contact if they have questions about the in-school vaccination program?

A: Persons with questions or seeking more information can contact their [local public health office](#) or 811.