

Guidance for Boarding Homes: Return to School

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Contents

Background	2
What is COVID-19?	2
How it spreads	2
Symptoms	2
Preventing the Spread of COVID-19.....	5
Environmental Cleaning.....	5
Hand hygiene	6
Cough/Sneeze Etiquette.....	6
Physical Distancing	6
Personal Items	7
Masks.....	7
Schools & COVID-19.....	10
What if a student or staff member develops symptoms at school?.....	10
Mental Health & Wellbeing	12
Create a healthy & supportive environment	12
Be mindful of stigma	12
Pathways to help	13



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Background

With COVID-19 still present in our catchment area, this year's back to school transition will look different for students. Students, their families, and their hosts may have questions about how things will work and how to stay safe in these uncertain times. This document provides information on how to create a safe and supportive environment for students during the COVID-19 outbreak.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 stands for coronavirus disease 2019. Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that can make us sick. Illnesses in humans range from the common cold to more serious respiratory infections like pneumonia. The specific coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is "novel", meaning that it hasn't been seen in humans before.

How it spreads

The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person. When someone with the virus coughs, sneezes, or talks, they produce respiratory droplets that can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Spread is more likely when people are in close contact with one another (within about 2 metres or 6 feet). Remember that infected people don't always show symptoms or know that they're sick.

People with the virus may also leave droplets on objects and surfaces when they sneeze, cough on, or touch them (e.g. handrails, doorknobs). Other people may become infected by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, noses or mouths without cleaning their hands.

Symptoms

Some people with COVID-19 will feel really sick, while others may not feel very sick at all. Here is a list of the most common symptoms:

- Fever (feeling hot to the touch, a temperature of 37.8°C or higher)
- Chills
- Cough that's new or worsening (continuous, more than usual)
- Barking cough or making a whistling when breathing (croup)
- Shortness of breath (out of breath, unable to breathe completely)
- Sore throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- Runny or stuffed up nose (not related to seasonal allergies or other known causes or conditions)
- Lost sense of taste or smell
- Pink eye (conjunctivitis)
- Headache that's unusual or long lasting
- Digestive issues (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain)
- Muscle aches
- Extreme tiredness that is unusual (fatigue, lack of energy)



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It's important that students know about these symptoms. **Talk about COVID-19 with students and ask if they have any questions. Make sure to screen students using the tool at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/> every morning before they leave for school. Encourage students to let staff know if they experience symptoms while at school.**

What if a student experiences symptoms of COVID-19 at home?

Here are some steps to take if a student tells you that they aren't feeling well (even if their symptoms are mild):

1. **Thank them for telling you.** They may have felt hesitant to share how they're feeling with you or be nervous about how you will react. It's important to affirm that they did the right thing.
2. **Reassure them.** They may feel nervous about getting sick, even if they don't show it. Let them know that you are here to support them.
3. **Ask them to stay home.** Do not take them to school. They should not leave the house, even if their symptoms are mild, unless symptoms worsen to the point where they cannot be managed at home (see more information on what to do in this scenario below). Doing this is called *self-isolating* and will help keep other people safe. Please visit our website for more information on [self-isolation](#).
4. **Complete the school screening tool to determine whether the student should be tested.** <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>
5. **Call your local assessment centre** to have the student assessed and to book a COVID-19 test. For a list of assessment centres and contact information visit <https://www.nwhu.on.ca/covid19/Pages/self-assessment.aspx>
6. **Let the school know** that the student will not be attending due to illness. Share that the student is self-isolating and will be tested.
7. **Please see below** for information on what will happen if a student experiences symptoms of COVID-19 while at school.
8. **If you need more information,** call our COVID-19 hotline at 1-866-468-2240.

Do other members of our household have to self-isolate too?

It depends on whether or not the student experiencing symptoms has a known exposure to COVID-19. A known exposure can happen in a number of ways, including:

- International travel
- Contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
- Having worked or been at a facility that is experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak

If any of these apply to the student within the past 14 days, they have had a known exposure and all household members must self-isolate while the student waits for their test results.

If these do not apply to the student within the past 14 days, they are not considered exposed. Household members do not need to self-isolate but should monitor themselves for symptoms. If household members develop symptoms, they must self-isolate immediately and get tested.



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What if the student tests positive for COVID-19?

If the student tests positive for COVID-19, a Public Health Nurse from the Northwestern Health Unit will contact you and give your instructions on what to do.

What if the student gets really sick?

You can care for the student in the same way that you would care for yourself or another family member when sick. While doing so, protect yourself and other household members from getting sick by following these tips:

- **Choose one person to provide care** for the student. This should not be someone who is more likely to get really sick from COVID-19, such as elderly people, people with chronic conditions, or people with compromised immune systems.
- **Keep your environmental clean.** Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that people touch often (see below for instructions). Line garbage cans with bags and empty them often. Wash laundry with regular soap and hot water, then dry it well. Wear a mask while completing these tasks and wash your hands after you're done.
- **Wear a face mask or covering while providing care** for the student if you can't maintain a two metre distance from them (see below for more information on masks).
- **Have the student use a separate bathroom** if possible.
- **Reduce your likelihood of coming into contact with the virus** by encouraging the student to cough or sneeze into their elbow. Don't share food, drinks, or personal items with them.
- **Wash or sanitize your hands often**, according to the instructions below, and encourage the student to do so as well. Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- **Monitor yourself for symptoms.** If you develop symptoms, even mild ones, arrange for testing by contacting your local assessment centre and inform the Northwestern Health Unit.

If the student's symptoms are worsening to a point where you cannot manage at home, go to your nearest emergency department or call 911. Let them know that the student has COVID-19.



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Preventing the Spread of COVID-19

There are many ways that you can help stop spread of COVID-19 from spreading. This will help protect students as well as other people you live with. **Be sure to model this behaviour yourself and share this information with students and other household members so they know what to do.**

Environmental Cleaning

Coronaviruses have a structure that allows them to be easily “killed” when an appropriate disinfectant is used correctly. People who are not sick can follow these instructions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Where and how often should I clean?

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, remote controls, and counters twice per day and when visibly dirty. Disinfect high-touch electronic devices (e.g., keyboards, touch screens and phones) twice a day.

What’s the difference between cleaning and disinfecting?

- Cleaners remove grease, dirt, and dust. Disinfectants contain chemicals that kill germs such as the virus that causes COVID-19.
- For a disinfectant to be effective, cleaning must be done first in order to remove any grease, dirt, or dust that may be present.
- Disinfectants have to sit for long enough before you wipe them in order to kill germs. Check the label for instructions.

How can I make sure I’m using the right products?

- Commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19. Vinegar, hard alcohols, baby wipes, and lemon juice are not effective against COVID-19.
- Some products are both cleaners and disinfectants. If you can’t find a combined product, use a cleaner before disinfecting.
- Disinfectants approved for use in Canada will have a Drug Identification Number (DIN) on the bottle. You can also [check online to see if products are approved for use by Health Canada](#).
- Disinfectant wipes are a combined cleaner and disinfectant but are NOT recommended for heavily soiled surfaces. Also, they will not work if they have dried out.
- If you do not have a disinfectant, use diluted, unscented bleach at a ratio of 1 part bleach to 50 parts water (e.g. 5 mL of bleach per 250mL of water). Use this solution within a day of mixing as bleach can degrade.

How can I make sure I’m using products safely?

- Read the label and only use as instructed. Don’t forget to check the expiry date.
- Never mix chemicals together unless it says to on the label. If that is the case, follow the instructions carefully.
- Open windows or turn on exhaust fans to provide ventilation while cleaning.



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- Wear gloves and personal protective equipment as recommended on the label. Wash hands after removing gloves.
- Store cleaning products in a place where children cannot get to them.

Do I have to change the way I do dishes or laundry?

No. Continue washing dishes and laundry the same way you normally do.

Hand hygiene

Keeping your hands clean is another important way of preventing the spread of COVID-19. Wash your hands frequently using soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water is not available, use hand sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol). Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.

How often should I wash my hands?

Wash your hands after using the washroom, before making or eating food, after touching frequently touched surfaces, when coming home from work or a public place, before and after putting on or taking off a mask, and when hands are visibly dirty.

How can I make sure I'm picking the right hand sanitizer?

Use an approved hand sanitizer containing a minimum of 60% alcohol. Look for a Natural Product Number (NPN) or Drug Identification Number (DIN) on the bottle, which indicates it is approved for sale by Health Canada.

Should I be wearing gloves?

No, wearing gloves is not helpful in stopping the spread of COVID-19 because the virus does not enter the body through your hands. Gloves can actually cause more harm than good. The virus can transfer on to gloves. Touching surfaces or your face with a contaminated glove can then transfer the virus. It is safer to avoid wearing gloves, touch only what you need to touch, and wash your hands frequently.

Cough/Sneeze Etiquette

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow when you cough or sneeze, even if you don't think you have COVID-19. Throw used tissues immediately in a lined garbage can, then wash your hands using soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer.

Physical Distancing

In combination with other infection prevention measures, physical distancing is proven to be one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of illness during an outbreak. This involves limiting the number of people you come into close contact with. Keep a distance of at least 2 meters from people outside of your household or social circle as much as possible.

Your household includes all of the people you live with. A social circle is made up of up to 10 people, including the members of your household, who you can interact with without physical



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distancing. [Learn more about how to establish your social circle here](#). Information on physical distancing can be found here: <https://www.nwhu.on.ca/covid19/Pages/physical-distancing.aspx>.

Some other ways of limiting your contact with others include staying away from places where there are high numbers of people, keeping your number of shopping trips down, using food delivery services or online shopping, working from home whenever possible, and using technology to keep in touch with friends and family outside of your social circle.

How can I make physical distancing easier for students?

Physical distancing is hard, especially for teens. Separated from friends and social networks and dealing with old-fashioned boredom, students may feel the effects of physical distancing even more than other members of your household. Help them cope with the “new normal” by:

- Telling them you’re proud that they are doing their part to help protect others
- Validating their feelings
- Focusing on healthy habits and routine
- Encouraging them to do things they enjoy as much as possible (this might mean relaxing screen time limits or encouraging them to pick up a hobby)
- Helping them to think about positive aspects of their day
- Helping or encouraging them to arrange calls with friends or family members

Personal Items

It is important that people avoid sharing personal items with others. This could include:

- Electronics (e.g. phones, video game controllers)
- Clothing and makeup
- Drink bottles or cans, including alcohol
- Marijuana, cigarettes, and pipes
- Other items that people touch frequently
- Other items that come into contact with peoples’ faces (e.g. forks and knives)

Masks

A mask can help stop the spread of droplets from a person’s mouth or nose. Evidence suggests that COVID-19 can be spread by people who aren’t showing symptoms or have mild symptoms, and so wearing a mask can be an added layer of protection.

Wearing a mask is part of a larger COVID-19 prevention strategy that includes the other measures listed above. Mask wearing alone will not prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Medical masks should be reserved for healthcare workers, and first responders, and education staff. **Provide students and other members of your household with non-medical or cloth masks. Encourage them to use masks by teaching them how to wear masks properly (see below) and by modeling these behaviors yourself.**



When and where should I wear a mask?

As of August 17, 2020, all members of the public and employees who enter or remain in an enclosed public space are required* to wear a mask or face covering. Indoor public spaces in the Northwestern Health Unit catchment area can include:

- Restaurants
- Indoor sports facilities
- Shopping malls
- Public transportation
- Personal service settings

Masks are also recommended in any setting where it is difficult or not possible to keep two meters from others.

*There are some exemptions to this order. Please see on webpage on [Masks](#) for more details.

Will students be required to wear masks at school?

[The Ministry of Education recently announced](#) that it will require students in Grades 4 to 12 wear masks indoors on school property. Students may wear their own non-medical masks. Non-medical masks will also be made available for students. Reasonable exceptions on the requirement to wear masks will apply.

Note that these requirements apply to public schools throughout the province. The Ministry of Education recommends the same for First Nations schools and private schools.

Is there a right or wrong way to wear masks?

Yes. Be sure to clean your hands immediately before and after putting it on and immediately before and after taking it off (that's four times). Continue to follow all other public health guidance while wearing a mask.

Also, make sure your mask fits properly:

The mask should :	The mask should not :
Allow for easy breathing	Make it hard for you to see or complete daily tasks
Fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops	Be made of plastic or other non-breathable materials
Be checked for tears or holes	Be secured with tape or other inappropriate materials
Be comfortable and not require adjustment	Be made of materials that easily fall apart
Be made of at least 2 layers of tightly woven material fabric (e.g. cotton or linen)	Be loose or hung from your neck or ears



Be large enough to completely and comfortably cover the nose and mouth without gaping	
Maintain its shape after washing and drying	

How should I clean masks?

Change masks when they get damp, soiled, or crumpled. Clean them according to following instructions:

1. If you have a washing machine, empty the container or bag containing your mask directly into the machine. Wash masks with other items using a hot cycle with laundry detergent (no special soaps are needed).

If you don't have a washing machine, hand scrub the mask using soap and hot water.

2. Discard the dirty bag or wash the reusable container.

3. Dry mask in a dryer if it will keep its shape and fit. If not, or if you don't have a dryer, hang or lay the mask on a clean surface to air dry.

4. Store your clean mask in a clean bag or container until you wear it.

Can I reuse masks?

It depends. Never reuse paper disposable masks. Place them in a garbage can as soon as you're done with them.

Cloth masks or face coverings can be re-used throughout the day if they are not damp, dirty or damaged. Reusable masks should be washed after they are done being used for the day. To reuse a cloth mask or face covering:

- With clean hands, remove the mask from your face using the ties or ear loops.
- Fold the mask in half with the outer surface facing inwards (so that the contaminated outer surface does not touch anything during storage).
- Place it in a clean bag or washable container with a lid until you're ready to use it again (label bags and containers with the user's name to prevent accidental misuse).
- Do not store masks in your pocket or other area (e.g. table) where they can become damaged or contaminated.



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Schools & COVID-19

While specific policies and procedures will vary, all schools are working closely with the Ministry of Education and Public Health Units to keep students safe.

Some examples of preventative measures will include:

- Monitoring for symptoms and supporting students and staff to stay home when sick.
- Implementing procedures and environments that support physical distancing (visual cues, desk spacing, small group recess, directing student movement through the school).
- Reinforcing frequent hand washing/sanitizing and cough/sneeze etiquette, including access to hand hygiene stations and tissues.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces.

Schools will continue to create a welcoming, respectful, inclusive, and supportive environment for all. They will educate students and staff about the importance of being kind to those that may have been tested or exposed to the virus. Promotion of healthy coping strategies and pathways to help within the school and community will be a priority.

What if a student or staff member develops symptoms at school?

Staff members

Staff members will go home immediately and self-isolate. If they cannot leave immediately, they will be isolated from others in a separate room. They will wear a mask if they can. Attending co-workers will physically distance if possible and provide hand sanitizer, tissues, and a garbage bin as needed. The room will be disinfected after the person leaves.

Students

Students will immediately be separated from others in a space where they can self-isolate until you pick them up. If their symptoms are mild, they could walk or bike home but should not take public transit. They will wear a mask if they can. Attending staff will physically distance if possible and provide hand sanitizer, tissues, and a garbage bin as needed. Staff will also be wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). The room will be disinfected after the person leaves.

Testing & Return to School

Any staff or students that develop symptoms of COVID-19 are advised to call their local assessment centre for testing. For a list of assessment centres and contact information visit <https://www.nwhu.on.ca/covid19/Pages/self-assessment.aspx>.

At this time individuals who test negative for COVID-19 can return to work or school 24 hours after symptoms begin to improve, unless they are self-isolating due to a known exposure (travel or close contact with a confirmed case). Tests or clearance letters are not required for return to work or school.

If the student does not to get tested, they must stay home from school:



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- Until 14 days after the symptoms of illness started, if symptoms have improved OR
- At least 24 hours after symptoms have improved, if an alternate diagnosis has been provided by a health care provider OR
- At least 24 hours after symptoms have improved AND a health care provider assessed the student and did NOT recommend testing for COVID-19.

If the student's symptoms are from a known cause that is not COVID-19 (e.g. menstrual cramps) or if the symptoms are normal for the student due to a chronic illness, they do not need to see a health care provider for an alternate diagnosis. Before returning to school, be sure the student completes the online school screening tool and gets a result that allows school attendance.

What if a student or staff member tests positive?

Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 must self-isolate and will be followed by a Public Health Nurse from the Northwestern Health Unit. The Public Health Nurse will tell the individual when they can end their self-isolation, which is typically 14 days after their symptoms first appeared. The Northwestern Health Unit will make contact with the school to let them know what steps they need to take. Anyone that is found to be a "close contact" of a person with COVID-19 will be contacted and provided with instructions on what to do next.



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Mental Health & Wellbeing

These are uncertain times for everyone. In addition to protecting students from COVID-19, it is important to support their mental health and overall wellbeing.

Create a healthy & supportive environment

Here are some tips on how to create a supportive environment for students:

- **Connect** – With outside social interactions being somewhat limited, you might be spending a lot more time at home than usual. Take advantage of this by inviting students on a walk, cooking meals together, or doing other activities that they enjoy.
- **Prioritize wellness** – Encourage students to eat regular meals, maintain regular bed and wake-up times, and spend time outside (unless they are self-isolating with symptoms, of course).
- **Encourage balance** – Just like adults, teens may use social media, Netflix, and gaming as distractions. This is expected, but encourage students to take breaks. Too much screen time can have a negative impact on mental health.
- **Be mindful** – Model positive coping skills by monitoring your own stress levels. Pause before talking about the pandemic to give students a break from constant news about the outbreak.
- **Maintain support systems** – Encourage students to connect virtually with their friends, family, and other members of their support system back home.
- **Bridge gaps** – Acknowledge what students may want in an ideal world and identify what is realistic in the current climate of physical distancing. They may not be able to get together with all of their friends at once, but help them socialize safely in small groups while maintaining physical distancing.
- **Validate and be patient** – Students may be experiencing many different emotions. They may not tell you how they're feeling, so watch for indications that they're stressed, frustrated, or scared. Acknowledge these feelings and let students know they are valid.
- **Provide support** – Let students know that they're not alone and that they can always come to you with questions or concerns.

Be mindful of stigma

The pandemic has been a source of anxiety and fear for many. Sometimes these emotions can fuel anger and stigma toward others. For example, some people who have contracted COVID-19 have been labeled as “careless” or having “brought COVID-19 to the community.” This has discouraged people from getting tested, negatively impacting their mental health and making it difficult to contain the virus. It may also discourage students from sharing information about how they're feeling with you.

It can be hard not to think this way, especially when it seems like there are so many unknowns. Here are some tips to realign your thinking so you can support the wider community:

- Respect people's privacy and avoid telling others if someone you know has COVID-19. Keep this in mind when cases are reported online or in the news.



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- Be mindful of how you talk about COVID-19 in front of students. If they hear you judging people who have contracted COVID-19, they may assume that you would do the same to them.
- Try to model positive thinking. There are many steps involved in containing the virus. People who have COVID-19 have no reason to lie about where they have been or with whom they have been in contact. This means that we can do a good public health investigation and keep others safe.
- Now that things are opening up, recognize that there is no “right” way to come out of isolation. If you don’t have the full story, avoid making judgements about where others are going or who they are seeing. Focus on what you can control.
- Speak out against stigmatizing behaviors when you see or hear them. Stand up for people who have COVID-19 so that they can focus on getting better and staying safe.

Pathways to help

There may be times when a student requires additional support. If you determine that this is the case, remind them that seeking help is a sign of strength and that they don’t have to face their struggles alone. Let them know about the services available to them and offer to help them connect.

A good first step is to connect with the student’s school to see what supports they can offer. Here are some examples of supports that students may be able to access outside of school:

Talk4Healing

Culturally grounded, confidential helpline for Indigenous women
Available in 14 Indigenous languages
Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Call 1-855-544-HEAL or chat at talk4healing.com

Good2Talk

Helpline available for 24/7 support
1-866-925-5454
Text GOOD2TALKON to 686868

NAN Hope Line

Mental health and addictions counselling for Nishnawbe Aski Nation citizens
Available in various Indigenous languages
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Call or Text 1-844-NAN-HOPE (1-844-626-4673)

Kids Help Phone

Confidential crisis support and professional counselling for youth
Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868

Jack.org

COVID-19 Youth Mental Health Resource Hub
<https://jack.org/COVID>



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Students may also be able to access support through the following government programs:

Non-Insured Health Benefits

Mental Health Counselling Program

Covers counselling from regulated mental health providers for eligible First Nations and Inuit people

[Visit the program's website](#) for more information

Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program

Covers counselling from regulated mental health providers for former Indian Residential School students and their families. [Visit the program's website](#) for more information.



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