



School Re-Entry Questions and Answers

Updated: February 23, 2021

This document will continue to be updated as information becomes available.

Introduction

The circumstances surrounding COVID-19 are fluid and continually evolving. We are committed to maintaining open and timely communication with our families as we continue to be provided with new direction from the government surrounding school re-entry.

It is important to note that decisions regarding school re-entry are made by Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health and Alberta Education. Holy Spirit Catholic School Division will follow all guidelines set out by these authorities.

It is also important to note that, while each school is required to utilize the guidelines provided, they will need to be able to implement these guidelines in a way that suits their site and community. As a result, some variations between schools can be expected.

Health Guidelines

What will the Holy Spirit Catholic School Division be doing to ensure physical safety for students and staff?

Schools and classes will look different than they did before, as we all follow new health measures. Our division is implementing the Government of Alberta's safety plans to reduce the spread of COVID-19. These include, but are not limited to:

- Asking staff and students to all to complete the [Alberta Daily Self-Screening Tool](#)
- Asking staff and parents/students and to stay at home when ill or are exhibiting any flu-like symptoms and to complete the [Alberta Health COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) for more guidance and direction. Division staff should instead complete the [Alberta Health COVID-19 Self-Assessment for Healthcare Workers and School Teacher and/or School Staff](#).
- Ensuring and teaching frequent hand sanitizing/hand washing
- Ensuring and teaching respiratory etiquette
- Ensuring and teaching physical distancing where possible in schools and on buses
- Ensuring that there is increased frequency of cleaning and disinfection, particularly of high touch surfaces
- Requiring mask use for all staff and for all students in Grades 4 to 12 in common areas (hallways, busses, etc...) and situations when 2 metres of physical distancing cannot be maintained. Please note that, while mask use is optional for Kindergarten to Grade 3 students in school, it is mandatory on Lethbridge busses. The Government will be providing two reusable masks for all staff and students.

The safest return to school possible during a pandemic is our shared responsibility. Families, students and staff all need to do their part to protect each other's well-being in our schools and communities. More information about can be found in our [Guidelines for Maintaining Safe & Health Schools in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

What if a case of COVID-19 is confirmed in a school?

If health officials confirm a case of COVID-19 in a school community, we will follow the process outlined by the province. The Zone Medical Officer of Health and the team from Alberta Health Services will take the lead and work with our division to share information with families, students and staff. They will:

- Identify cases through easily accessible testing
- Identify close contacts
- Create isolation measures when needed
- Provide follow-up recommendations

Alberta Health Services will determine who is contacted in the event of a positive case. School administration will not be at liberty to share this information.

A COVID-19 case will not automatically lead to school closure. It could be that only the group of students and staff who came in close contact will be required to stay home for 14 days.

Parents will be notified if a case of COVID-19 is confirmed at a school. If a student is required to [isolate or quarantine](#), their school will support them to learn at home. Our division is committed to working with provincial health partners to keep families informed.

To provide further clarity on this topic, Alberta Health Services has provided schools with these updated guidelines: [Resource guide for COVID-19 cases in schools \(K-12\) settings: before, during, and after a COVID-19 alert or outbreak](#) (January 2021).

What if a student gets ill while at school?

If a student exhibits signs of illness while at school, parents/caregivers will be notified and advised to pick-up their child immediately. The student will be asked to wear a non-medical mask if able to do so safely, and be isolated in a separate room or kept at least 2 metres away from others. Parents need to ensure the school has their most up-to-date contact information. All items the student touched/used prior to and during isolation will be cleaned and disinfected as soon as the child/student has been picked up.

How long student/parent/staff members should isolate after having symptoms?

You are legally required to isolate for a minimum of 10 days, or until symptoms resolve whichever takes longer, if you have a cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose, or sore throat that is not related to a pre-existing health condition or if you test positive for COVID-19. If you tested negative and have no known exposure to the virus, stay home until your symptoms resolve. If you tested negative and have had an exposure to the virus, you are legally required to quarantine for 14 days from the exposure date.

Are masks required?

Masks are emerging as an important way to mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19, particularly when people are indoors and physical distancing is a challenge.

All staff and students in Grades 4–12 will be required to wear a mask in common areas and when physical distancing at school and in the classroom is not possible. This is one way to help reduce the risk of spreading the virus, and follows the [Chief Medical of Health's Order 33-2020](#). Please note that, while mask use is optional for Kindergarten to Grade 3 students in school, it is mandatory for all riders on Lethbridge busses.

Some important things to know about the use of masks are:

- Individuals who are physically or developmentally unable to wear a mask will be excused from this health protocol
- Families will work with the school principal to discuss this relative to their child
- Masks are required for staff who are wearing face shields
- Masks will be an important item on school supply lists for families. Every student in the division will be provided with two reusable masks by Alberta Education
- If someone forgets their mask, schools will ensure there are supplies available
- Alternatives to non-medical face masks (e.g. gaiters, buffs, bandanas, etc...) offer less protection than non-medical face masks and, as such, are not permitted in our schools
- Please follow the provincial health guidelines regarding [COVID-19 mask requirements](#)

For students in grades 4 to 12 who are unable to wear a mask due to one of the exceptions outlined in the [Chief Medical of Health's Order 33-2020](#), parents/guardians should contact school administration and secure a "Request for Exemption to Mask Requirement in Grades 4-12" Form. This form will require that a doctor provides a letter specifically detailing the need for accommodation. In addition, adherence to other public health measures, such as maintaining 2 metres physical distance from others, should still be ensured.

How are reusable masks to be cleaned?

It is recommended that fabric reusable masks be cleaned regularly. They can be washed in your regular laundry using hot water and tumble dried on a high setting. They can also be hand washed with hot, soapy water by scrubbing the mask for at least 20 seconds and then drying it on high heat in the dryer. Store masks in a sealed and clean storage bag and place in a dry area of your home. Throw out the storage bag after you've used it to store masks.

What is my role as a parent in keeping our schools safe?

- Before leaving home everyday, complete the [Daily Screening Questionnaire](#) for your child. If you answer "Yes" to any of the questions, **PLEASE STAY HOME**. This is the number one way we can help to protect our children and staff.
- Talk to your children about the new health measures and teach and practice hand washing / sanitizing, physical distancing, proper mask use, etc....
- Pick up your child promptly if they show symptoms at school. Please ensure the school has your most up-to-date contact information so they may reach you if your child needs to be picked up.
- If your child normally takes the bus, consider taking them directly to the school if your personal situation allows for it. This would help with physical distancing on the bus for students who do not have other options besides taking the bus.

How can I help my child prepare for school re-entry?

Your child may feel nervous about what school will be like. While there will be changes, the key school experience will be the same as before—they will learn in class with their teacher and see friends.

We encourage parents to talk to their children about some of the new health measures and to practice these important skills to help them prepare for the first day of school:

- Clean / Sanitize hands before entering the school or classrooms
- Proper mask use - how to put on masks, take off masks, store masks, etc... (Dr. Deena Hinshaw has [created this video](#) to demonstrate proper mask use)
- Keep a distance between others and follow marks in hallways

- Do not share food or personal items
- Do not bring unnecessary personal items to school
- Cover coughs and sneezes
- Tell staff if feeling sick at school
- Lunch and recess time may change to allow for more physical distancing
- Students may be asked to stay in their own cohort to decrease contact with others
- All students who take the bus will have to sit in the same seat every day and wear masks, as directed.

Instruction and Learning

Are there at-home learning options if I don't feel comfortable sending my child to school?

We recognize there is uncertainty for some of our families as we move closer to September. To help us make accurate plans, we've sent out a survey to learn who plans to attend school this September and who feel more comfortable continuing learning at-home.

An at-home learning approach will be offered to students in Grades K-12 for the 2020-21 school year only, as long as we are in a pandemic context. It will involve a combination of online instruction and independent work which requires significant commitment from both students and parents. It will not provide the same learning opportunities or support as in-person learning (eg. science labs, immediate access to teacher support, etc.) Unlike the emergency pandemic learning that took place in the spring of 2020, at-home learning will require students to participate full time in their learning and to meet all of the curricular outcomes and assessments in the Alberta Programs of Study.

Families opting for at-home learning will have the ability to return to in-school instruction. Requests for change must be provided in writing to school administration at least one month prior to returning. For high school students, changes can only take effect during the school's scheduled quarter/semester breaks.

For more information, visit the division's ["At-Home Learning"](#) webpage.

What might at-home instruction look like under Scenario 1?

If a family chooses at-home learning, the Alberta Education Program of Studies will be covered and assessment will occur. At-home students will remain enrolled at the school where they are registered for 2020-2021. Students who learn at-home will be part of an online learning group with an assigned Holy Spirit teacher. However, the teacher may not be a staff member at their designated school. This learning format will include live online teacher instruction, activities and assignments that students will complete independently.

For more information, visit the division's [At-Home Learning](#) webpage.

What if I change my mind and would like my child to attend school or begin online learning?

We understand that these are difficult decisions to make. To ensure educational continuity for both students and staff, we are hoping parents will be able to make a firm decision by September 1, 2020 at the latest. However, we know that there may be extenuating circumstances that mean that changes need to be accommodated.

For parents/guardians of elementary and junior high aged students wishing to switch their child's programming from in-person to at-home, or vice versa, we ask that you contact your school principal directly and provide them with a month's notice to make the necessary arrangements.

For parents/guardians of high school students wishing to switch their child's programming from in-person to at-home, or vice versa, changes can only take effect during the school's scheduled quarter/semester breaks. Watch for school communications inquiring about your plans and keep your school principal informed of your decisions well in advance of the break.

Will there be “at-home learning” for students attending an Early Learning Program?

Given the play-based nature of our Early Learning Program, it will only be provided directly within the school.

What is the difference between “at-home learning” and “home-schooling”?

Holy Spirit Catholic School Division is offering at-home learning for the 2020/21 school year. This will allow families to continue their education, often online, with a certified Holy Spirit teacher delivering instruction to your child, and remain registered with Holy Spirit. They will also have the ability to return to in-school instruction. Requests for change must be provided in writing to school administration at least one month prior to returning.

Homeschooling is a very different and specific program where you as the parent/guardian would be required to plan and deliver instruction as well as assess student learning and achievement. Unfortunately, Holy Spirit Catholic School Division does not offer home-schooling as an option. If you are interested in pursuing home-schooling for your child, you would be required to register your child with another school division provider that offers this specific type of education. Choosing this option would render your child to be a homeschool student for the 2020-21 school year at minimum.

What is a cohort?

Administrators will create groups of students and staff who stay together throughout the day as much as possible. This will minimize exposure to other individuals and reduce the likelihood of spreading any possible viruses. When applied with all of the other health measures, we will be incorporating will help to mitigate future infections.

Will class sizes be reduced?

Further to the Government of Alberta's July 21, 2020 announcement and reentry plan, we are returning in a Scenario 1 situation. This means a possible return to school for all of our students and, as such, there are no restrictions on class size. Teachers and administrators will make every effort to space out student desks in order to maximize distances between them.

What is the plan for the delivery of learning for students with exceptional needs?

Regardless of the option chosen by parents (in-school or at-home learning), accommodations and adaptations for individual students with exceptional needs will continue to be addressed in keeping with each student's Instructional Support Plan (ISP). Please note that the division must ensure that government guidelines are being followed to mitigate risks to both staff and students, so all face-to-face programming will only take place in the school setting.

Will there be Provincial Achievement Tests this year?

At the end of the 2019/2020 school year, Alberta Education had provided local authorities with a choice about whether or not to hold Provincial Achievement Tests for the upcoming 2020/2021. Holy Spirit Catholic School Division determined at that time that it would be in the best interest of the students NOT to hold Grade 6 or 9 Provincial Achievement Tests for the duration of this school year.

Will there be Diploma Exams this year?

On October 13, 2020, Education Minister Adriana LaGrange announced that students/parents will have the option to write the October/November sitting of the Diploma Exams. If they do opt to write, the exam will be worth 30% of the student's final mark. Prior to making this important decision, students/parents are encouraged to check with their post-secondary institution of choice to ensure that their admission will not be impacted.

At this time, future scheduled Diploma Exams are expected to proceed as usual.

School Operations and Protocols

Will schools be open for parents/guardians, visitors and other service providers?

We value our relationships with our families, but for the beginning of the school year, our buildings will be "Closed Campuses." This means that, in order to ensure we abide by regulations such as appropriate social distancing, we will ask all visitors to make an appointment ahead of time and complete a health screening prior to entering the building. A record of all visitors will be kept for contact tracing purposes.

Will schools still be running extra-curricular programs and clubs?

Unfortunately, not at this time. Our primary goal is to reduce contacts for students and staff during reopening. We want our students and staff to feel comfortable before any of these activities resume. Schools will be required to have all students and personnel out of the buildings by 5 p.m. so that appropriate cleaning protocols and sanitization can occur. Should the division move to providing limited extra-curricular activities/ athletics, it will be following the requirements set out by Alberta Health Services, and for high school athletics, directions as laid out by the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association (ASAA).

Will there be field trips this year?

Under provincial direction, field trips that require students to ride on a bus or by private vehicle are not permitted at this time. Further, all international and national field trips for the 2020/2021 school year are suspended due to the uncertainty and risks associated with travel during COVID-19. Overnight trips are currently suspended and will be reviewed at a later date. The opportunity to plan and participate in overnight trips will be reviewed on an ongoing basis throughout the school year. At this time, virtual field trips, classroom field trips or socially distanced community walking trips are able to occur with the appropriate safety measures in place.

Will singing or band be allowed?

These activities, in close proximity to others, are considered to be high-risk. That being said, they may be permitted so long as a robust implementation plan has been approved and all participants adhere to the guidelines established by the Government of Alberta:

- [Guidance for singing and vocal performance](#)
- [Guidance for live instrumental music](#)

Transportation and Bussing

What precautions will be put in place for students on the bus?

The public health measures for school buses include increased cleaning and disinfection of high touch surfaces, maintaining a protective zone for the driver, assigning students to seats that are grouped with other household members, and using loading/unloading procedures that support physical distancing of 2 metres between students when possible.

Please note that, while transportation protocols may vary depending on the transportation provider, within the City of Lethbridge, **masks are required for all students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 on school buses.** This is in keeping with City of Lethbridge bylaw requirements that masks are to be worn on all public transportation, including school buses.

On the survey, I indicated that I was willing to drive my children to school. What if I have changed my mind or need to make alternate arrangements?

If you've changed your mind from what you had indicated on the August 2020 Parent/Guardian Survey for school re-entry, and you are eligible for transportation (2.4 km or further from your designated school), contact your child's school to assist you in making the necessary arrangements. Please note that it can take up to two weeks to process your request.