Frequently Asked Questions – Health and Safety

It is highly recommended that parents with questions about health and safety concerns familiarize themselves with the COVID-19 Public Health Office's Guidance for K-12 School Settings document. School districts do not set health and safety requirements and are required to adhere to these guidelines. The Richmond School District is continuing to meet or exceed all health and safety guidelines as outlined. This document will be added to and refined as additional information becomes available.

1. **Is physical distancing still required in schools?**
   Although physical distancing will no longer be required, schools will continue to create space between people, including:

   - Managing flow of people in common areas, including hallways and around lockers, to minimize crowding and allow people to pass through easily
   - Preventing crowding at pick-up and drop-off times
   - Reminding students and staff about respecting others' personal space, using visual supports, signage, prompts and video modelling as necessary
   - Using available space to spread people out where possible
   - Taking students outside as much as possible

2. **How is the school district managing ventilation?**
   The Richmond School District is fully compliant with all school ventilation requirements. During the pandemic, the Richmond School District is paying special attention to air quality in our schools. The district is taking concrete steps to ensure that our students and staff come to school and work each day in a clean, healthy and safe work environment. Over $2.1 million has been spent or committed to HVAC system improvements in Richmond schools in 2021 - these projects have either been completed or are under construction.

   The district works closely with, and takes direction from, public health officials to ensure that heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are designed, operated and maintained as per Provincial standards and specifications:

   - Mechanical ventilation systems are in excellent working order through scheduled filter changes and equipment maintenance.
   - Extended operating hours for ventilation systems – initiating ventilation systems well before school starts each day to flush the air in all rooms prior to occupancy.
   - Increased fresh air exchange in accordance with Provincial guidelines.

   Windows in classrooms, offices, libraries, multipurpose or other rooms that do not currently have mechanical ventilation systems will be kept open as much as possible to ensure outdoor air is naturally exchanged with inside air. Maintenance staff will monitor and adjust heating settings as necessary.

3. **What is the current mask mandate in schools?**
In all matters related to public health, our schools follow the direction of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO). To limit transmission, all K to 12 staff, students in grades 4 to 12, and visitors are required to wear masks in all indoor areas, including:

- At their desks
- On school buses

Exceptions to the mask policy include:

- A person who cannot tolerate wearing a mask for health or behavioural reasons
- A person unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person
- If the mask is removed temporarily for the purposes of identifying the person wearing it
- If the mask is removed temporarily to engage in an educational activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask. For example:
    o Playing a wind instrument
    o Engaging in high-intensity physical activity
- If a person is eating or drinking
- If a person is behind a barrier
- While providing a service to a person with a disability or diverse ability (for example, a hearing impairment), where visual cues, facial expressions and/or lip reading/movements are important

Students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 are encouraged to wear a mask indoors in schools and on school buses, but are not required to do so. Mask wearing remains a personal or family/caregiver choice for these students.

4. **Does my child require vaccination to attend school?**
Students are not required vaccines to attend school. However, according to public health experts, vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19. As of August 31, 2021, Richmond has an 88 per cent first dose vaccination rate and an 81 per cent second dose rate as of September 7, 2021.

Public health officials continue to strongly encourage all British Columbians aged 12 and over to be fully vaccinated (i.e. receive 2 doses) to protect themselves and those around them. Registration is available:
    o Online through the Get Vaccinated portal.
    o By calling 1-833-838-2323. Translators are available.
    o In person at any Service BC location. People can also be immunized at drop-in vaccine clinics throughout the province.

5. **How often will the district be cleaning and disinfecting schools?**
In accordance with the current health and safety guidelines, general cleaning of schools, cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces will be conducted at least once in every 24-hour period and when visibly dirty.

6. **Will parents be allowed to pick up kids for lunch and take them home?**
   In the interest of everyone's health and safety, we are minimizing visitors to the school, including parents and guardians. This means that students should come to school with their lunch and snacks and everything that they need for the day.

7. **Will students and staff still be required to engage in the mandatory health declaration process each day?**
   To reduce the likelihood of coming to a school or school district site when ill, students, staff and other adults (e.g. visitors) are required to complete a daily health check prior to entering the building.
   a. Families and students can use the K-12 Health Check app.
   b. Staff and other adults can refer to the BCCDC's *When to get tested for COVID-19* document. Staff, students and families can also use the BCCDC online Self-Assessment Tool, call 8-1-1 or their health care provider.
   c. As a reminder, students, staff or other adults must stay home when ill or when required by public health to self-isolate