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Guidelines released for January 10 return to school

With students returning to school next week, the Public Health Officer (PHO) and [Ministry of Education have released updated protocols](#) in response to the recent surge in COVID cases caused by the virus' Omicron variant. The protocols are in place for the full return of students on January 10 with the goal of keeping schools open for in-person learning.

Summary

Three-layer masks will be provided to students and staff on return to school, and a refresher on the proper use of masks will be provided.

Students and staff will be asked to do a self-health check each day before attending school. Parents will be asked to report results of self-administered rapid antigen tests to help identify cases in schools.

The PHO says with higher levels of community transmission, a shorter virus incubation period of the Omicron variant, contact tracing and close contact notification by public health is a less effective way to limit COVID-19 transmission in schools. So, **school districts are being directed to closely monitor staff and student attendance** and absences due to illness to identify potential outbreaks or other problems that might lead to functional closures.

School districts will be responsible to make the decision if a functional school closure is required, in consultation with the regional medical officer.

The district will have plans in place to transition to online learning. CUPE has made clear through the Provincial Education Steering Committee that **the union expects wage continuity for all school support staff in the event of functional closures**.

School districts have taken the week delay in the return to school to put in place updated protocols. These plans include staggered breaks, restricting visitors, revised plans for distancing and reduce crowding, and the use of virtual assemblies and staff meetings. **Policies and protocols allowing for school staff to work remotely are at the discretion of school districts.**

The updated [COVID-19 Protocols for School & District Administrators and Staff: Management of School-Associated Activity is available online](#) and at bcschools.cupe.ca.

Rapid testing

The Public Health Officer says self-administered rapid antigen tests will be circulated to vital public services in the coming weeks, and school staff showing COVID symptoms will be a priority for these tests. More information will be provided when the tests are distributed.

Mental health resources

The recent surge in COVID cases has been incredibly stressful for many students and staff. Mental health resources are available to assist schools in supporting students and staff in their return to school:

- [Compassionate Learning Communities – Supporting Trauma-Informed Practice](#)
- [Building Compassionate Communities in a New Normal](#) – recorded webinar for educators
- [Linda O'Neill – Trauma Informed in the Classroom](#)
- [Ministry of Children and Family Development: Healing Families, Helping Systems: A Trauma-Informed Practice Guide for Working with Children, Youth and Families](#)