

August 15, 2025

Dear Independent School Administrators, Teachers and Staff:

Re: Updates and Considerations for a Healthy & Safe Return to School – 2025/2026

Welcome back to school! Within this annual letter, you will find updates on public health programs, services, and resources to support school communities. Thank you for your continued work to improve the health, safety, and well-being of students and staff.

1. **Communicable disease guidance for K-12 schools:** Provincial public health guidance to support prevention and mitigation of communicable disease in school settings is located at this web [location](#). BC has been experiencing some measles activity but the majority of cases have occurred in Northern BC with limited transmission to other areas. The virus is transmitting mainly in un/underimmunized communities. Given the increase in illness activity in many areas of Canada and globally, locally we can expect the occasional travel associated case. However, as measles immunization rates are generally high in VCH schools, we do not anticipate significant transmission.

In the event of communicable disease exposure in school (ex, to a case of measles or pertussis), our Public Health nursing staff based in Vancouver may call school administrators to gather information on student participation to assess risk of exposure and inform public health actions. This is a confidential risk assessment; please support our staff when they call. Actions undertaken in schools are guided by a medical health officer and can include notifications to exposed students and staff, offering of immunizations in school or community setting, and rarely exclusion of unimmunized individuals exposed to a case of measles. If you become aware of a potential communicable disease case (such as measles), please connect directly with your school Public Health Nurse (PHN) for confirmation and appropriate next steps.

2. **Routine childhood vaccines:** School-based immunization clinics for students start in late September and continue until next June. Immunizations will be offered to students in grades K, 6, 9, those who missed immunization clinics at school last year, and students new to the school district. HPV cancer prevention vaccine, offered to grade 6 and 9 students, will also be offered to grade 10-12 students who remain eligible. Immunizations are primarily offered to students based on parental consent; youth consent can also be used in secondary schools. This fall we are piloting a new electronic consent process in a few schools to evaluate uptake with a plan to expand to all schools for the new year. Paper consent forms will be sent home to those families who are unable to provide electronic consent. We thank you for supporting in-school immunization clinics by navigating consent packages, providing our staff with an appropriate space to hold the clinics and adequate time so that students can be immunized safely. We request that clinic dates once booked be protected from other programming conflicts so that students are available to be immunized.

As of July 1, 2019, parents and guardians are legally required to report immunization records of school age children. The [Vaccine Status Reporting Regulation](#) also applies to international and independent school students. Please take this opportunity to review your process for forwarding immunization histories submitted to schools to the school PHN. Up-to-date immunization records enable us to provide the best care, recommend missed immunizations to students, and respond quickly to outbreaks.

3. **School health promotion tools and resources aligned with Physical Health and Education (PHE) curriculum:** Our new [healthy sexuality program](#) supports Grades 8-10 teachers to gain knowledge, skills,

and confidence for teaching the PHE curriculum. The program includes Pro-D workshops, lesson plans, and in-classroom support from the school PHNs. The [physical health program](#) is available to support Grade 2 teachers improve student physical activity, nutrition, and sleep. [Mental wellness resources](#) for parents are also available. PHNs will meet with school administrators in the fall to discuss school needs and opportunities. For more information, visit our [VCH School Health webpage](#).

4. **Managing medical conditions at school:** See our [School Health Medical Management online education hub](#) for *Anaphylaxis*, *Diabetes*, *Seizures*, and *Asthma* courses that enable school staff to support students manage these medical conditions at school. Your school PHN can support school staff to access the courses, answer questions, and, if requested, provide hands-on skills practice at your school. Please see [Appendix](#) for a poster to support school communication about the education hub.
5. **Response to Unexpected Health Emergencies Policy:** Injectable naloxone kits for schools for staff/occupational use can be ordered online via the [Product Distribution Centre \(PDC\)](#). For assistance in ordering naloxone kits for public schools, please contact: PDCCustomerSer@gov.bc.ca or 604-927-2000. Intranasal naloxone (nasal spray) can be purchased through community pharmacies. While not required by the Ministerial Order, independent schools can purchase naloxone kits (injectable or intranasal) also through community pharmacies.

[TowardTheHeart.com](#) is an excellent website which provides online naloxone training and other harm reduction resources. Other resources include [NaloxoneTraining.com](#), [St John Ambulance](#) (in person or online training), [Not Just Naloxone](#) (virtual or in-person training with an Indigenous perspective around substance use), [First Nations Health Authority Naloxone](#) benefits, and [Guidelines for Providing Harm Reduction Services to Youth in BC](#).

While not required by the Order, we are supportive of overdose recognition and response training for students in secondary schools. We and the BCCDC advise against bulk distribution of naloxone kits at group training events. Your school PHN can guide you to local youth-specific resources.

6. **School food programming:** Public Health Dietitians are available to provide ongoing support in implementing the [Feeding Futures](#) and the [School Food Toolkit](#) funding to expand and create effective and inclusive school food programs for the entire school community. We can assist you in navigating the logistical components of program implementation, including advise on healthy, safe and culturally appropriate food options that meet the nutritional needs of students with diverse dietary considerations. To learn more about how to connect with our Public Health Dietitian, please visit our [Public Health Dietitian Services](#) page.
7. **Vision:** We recommend that all children see an optometrist by Kindergarten entry to start school ready to learn. Please share this [printable poster](#) with families in your school community by including it in your regular communications with parents and caregivers such as electronic newsletters, parent portals or printed packages that are sent home. Posters in other languages are available through your school PHN.
8. **In-school screening services:** Hearing screening for kindergarten students is conducted annually. Public health staff will contact schools directly to schedule hearing screening. Schools can also refer students with specific hearing concerns to their local public health audiology clinics. A package will be provided to each teacher with parent/guardian notices about these services.
9. **Youth Sexual Health Clinics:** We continue to offer youth-only accessible sexual health services in our communities. For more information see our [Sexual Health Services](#) page.

10. **Public health inspection of schools:** Environmental Health Officers provide regular school inspections every three years on behalf of the School Medical Officer, the Medical Health Officer working with your School District. The next planned inspection cycle will begin in early 2026 and reports will be provided to all school districts within the calendar year. Inspections support the School District in creating and sustaining healthy schools and focus on public health concerns such as communicable disease prevention, safe drinking water, food safety, and general maintenance and sanitation.
11. **Understanding the health of your school community:** Data on the health of your school population are available through a number of survey sources including CHEQ, EDI MDI and YDI available at the [Human Early Learning Partnership](#). We encourage you to review this information with your school PHNs to identify health priorities for the school community.
12. **Community health promotion grants:** If your school, school district, parent advisory council, or a student group sponsored by your school is considering a one-time-only project that aims to address one of your school community's determinants of health and wellness, you may be eligible to apply for one of our one-time-only health promotion small grant programs. Please visit [VCH Health Promotion Grants](#) to learn more about VCH's health promotion project grants and check back regularly or sign up for notifications about future calls for grant applications.
13. **Extreme heat and wildfire smoke:** Extreme heat and wildfire smoke events are becoming more frequent and severe as the climate changes. Extreme heat can lead to heat illnesses including dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke – a medical emergency. The small particles in wildfire smoke, also known as fine particulate matter (PM2.5), can travel deep into the lungs when breathed in and cause inflammation throughout the body. This can have both short-term and longer-lasting health impacts. Children, infants, and people with certain chronic health conditions are particularly susceptible to the health effects of extreme heat and wildfire smoke. For guidance and recommendations for schools to prepare for and minimize harms of extreme heat events and wildfire smoke, visit the [VCH Public Health resources webpage](#).

If you have any questions about the content of this letter, the programs and services we offer, or if you wish to discuss any of the resources linked herein, please contact your school PHN. We thank you for your dedication to ensuring schools are a safe, healthy environment for children and youth to learn and play. Please do not hesitate to connect with us regarding any questions or for support with policy development or implementation.

Yours sincerely,

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Appendix: Public Health Programs & Services Available for 2025-2026

School Public Health Nurses

- ✓ Support school staff to safely manage medical conditions at school via medical emergency response training, hands on skills practice (upon request), and consultation on safe school practices.
- ✓ Immunization clinics.
- ✓ Consultation to school staff on communicable disease, general health concerns, and student health concerns.
- ✓ Partner with schools on school health promotion initiatives.

Health Promotion

- ✓ PHNs, Public Health Dietitians, and Community Health Specialists can collaborate with schools and school districts to support school health promotion initiatives to best meet your school & school district needs using the [Comprehensive School Health Framework](#).
- ✓ See our [School Health webpage](#) for school resources to help take action on child and youth health.
- ✓ Dietitians and Community Health Specialists provide district-level support, including workshops to enhance staff knowledge and skills in student nutrition and physical health promotion. For more information, please contact your school District leads and visit [Supporting Healthy Eating at School](#).

Sexual Health Clinics – Youth-Only Clinic Hours

- ✓ Services for youth include provision of contraception including emergency contraception and IUDs, pregnancy testing and options counselling, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, HIV PrEP, immunizations, harm reduction and referrals.
- ✓ More information, including clinic times for youth-only hours can be found [here](#).

Tobacco & Vapour Reduction Program

- ✓ Providing training for educators (e.g., Professional Development Day education).
- ✓ Provides education sessions for students and parents.
- ✓ Provides resources and teaching tools/toolkits.
- ✓ For more information, contact smokefree@vch.ca and visit [VCH Youth Vaping](#).

Dental Health

- ✓ Provides dental screening to kindergarten students every 3 years to monitor trends in early childhood dental health and identify children with dental concerns. Provincial dental screening is on hold and currently under review. The most recent public Dental Survey report can be found [here](#).
- ✓ Promotes oral health education and provides preventative services to families.
- ✓ For free or low cost dental services and dental benefits, including the new [Canadian Dental Care Plan](#) for children whose families find dental services a financial barrier, please see [VCH Dental Health](#).

Pediatric Team

- ✓ Provides nursing support services, occupational therapy, and physical therapy consultation services for school-age children with complex medical conditions. Please contact your [local Pediatric Team](#) for occupational therapy and physical therapy services available in your community. Please contact your local Nursing support services [team](#) for nursing support
- ✓ Provides educational in-services for school staff and input into Education Plans and school-based meetings to support inclusion in the school community.

Audiology

- ✓ [Audiology clinics](#) provide hearing assessments, hearing screening programs, counselling, hearing aid fittings, and follow-up services for children from 0 until their 19th birthday.
- ✓ Provide school-based hearing screening for Kindergarten students, and full audiology assessment for students that do not pass K hearing screening.
- ✓ Work closely with Hearing Resource Teachers to support students with hearing needs and equipment in the classroom