

14 September 2021

Dear School Administrators, Teachers and Staff:

**Re: Updates and Considerations for a Healthy & Safe Return to School – 2021/2022**

This is our annual letter to welcome you back to school with an update on public health guidance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, public health programs & services, and resources to support the health and well-being of your school communities. We thank you for your continued thoughtful consideration toward the health and safety of students and staff as you welcome them back to school.

**1. Public health guidance for K-12 schools:** Evidence demonstrates that during the 2020-2021 school year, schools were low-risk sites for COVID-19 transmission, even after the introduction of variants of concern. Unfortunately, evidence also shows that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictive measures have had significant unintended consequences for the mental, physical, and social health of children and youth. Provincial guidance has been updated to support a balance between risk prevention and recovery efforts, and can be found [here](#).

**2. Routine childhood & COVID vaccines:**

**Routine immunization clinics:** The immunization clinics for routine childhood vaccines are expected to commence in late September and will last until June. You may recall that immunization services in schools were suspended last year and thus this year's clinics will be larger in size and will likely require more time and space. As we offer routine vaccines to students 12 years and older in all schools, we will also offer COVID vaccine to eligible students. Please support our staff with a large safe space and plenty of time for their clinic so that they can immunize all who need to be caught up.

**COVID vaccine promotion:** During the month of September, Vancouver Coastal Health will be promoting COVID vaccination to students, staff and families. Two mRNA vaccines are now available to students: Pfizer and Moderna. Unimmunized individuals can now register [here](#) and we encourage everyone who is eligible to get two doses of the vaccine. Please help us in getting this message out to your school community.

**3. Other routine in-school public health services:** Due to the continued demands of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are a number of modifications to the delivery of health services in school. Hearing and vision screening for K students is on hold. Consideration for limited school-based hearing screening will be assessed in early 2022. Public health audiology clinics remain open and schools can refer students with hearing concerns to their local public health audiology clinic. Resources for the management of emergency medical issues (anaphylaxis, seizures, asthma and diabetes/glucagon administration) are attached in [Appendix B](#).

**4. Supporting the health and well-being of children & youth:** School transitions, such as a return to a school routine after a summer break, can cause students to feel anxious and overwhelmed as they are faced with new challenges and concerns. The ongoing pandemic and associated restrictions have created new stressors for young people, and many are experiencing heightened mental health challenges. Trends in other health behaviors impacted by the pandemic are concerning and include [declining physical activity rates](#), escalating sedentary behavior, disruptions in sleep, inadequate nutrition, and [increases in youth vaping](#) - all have impacts on emotional, mental and physical well-being.

To support student well-being and a positive school experience, we encourage you to consider the following:

- Integration of more opportunities for movement during the school day, including the promotion of [active transportation to and from school](#) and [Bike to School](#) education through HUB Cycling. [Outdoor schools](#) provide a unique learning environment with ample mental and physical health benefits.

- Strategies for increasing [school connectedness](#); students are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors and succeed academically when they feel connected to school.
- Integration of the [Vaping Health Education toolkits](#) (one for Grades 5-7 and one for Grades 8-10) into the curriculum. These include a series of resources that can be used to prepare teachers for presenting about vaping to their students.
- Ways to support school staff in providing children with positive food experiences at school. Check out the VCH [Supporting Healthy Eating at School](#) page for evidence-based tools and resources.

To inform your efforts, we encourage you to explore the data sources included in [Appendix C](#) that provide information about the health and well-being of students in your district.

In closing, we thank you for your attention to ensuring a safe and healthy school year. 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 Medical Officer or your local school public health nurse.

Yours sincerely,



**Mark Lysyshyn MD MPH FRCPC**  
Deputy Chief Medical Health Officer  
Vancouver Coastal Health

*On behalf of Vancouver Coastal Health's School Medical Officers:*

**Dr. John Harding, School Medical Officer (Coastal Rural)**  
**Dr. Alexandra Choi, School Medical Officer (North Shore)**  
**Dr. Meena Dawar, School Medical Officer (Richmond)**  
**Dr. Althea Hayden, School Medical Officer (Vancouver)**  
**Dr. Mark Lysyshyn, School Medical Officer (Vancouver)**



## Appendix A: Public Health Programs for 2021-22

Please discuss the following programs with your School Medical Officer or your local school public health nurse

### Public Health Nursing

- ✓ Provides resources for medical management health education to staff.
- ✓ Promotes healthy school initiatives.
- ✓ Provides preventive measures (e.g. vaccines).
- ✓ Performs individual health assessments and consultation, health education and promotion.

### Nutrition

- ✓ VCH Public Health Dietitians are pleased to share the new BC Educator's Toolkit for Exploring Canada's Food Guide. This resource was developed collaboratively by dietitians, teachers, and Indigenous knowledge keepers, for teachers. This and other resources to support food literacy and disordered eating prevention can be found at the VCH webpage [Supporting Healthy Eating at School](#).
- ✓ Along with the above resources and tools, dietitians can also provide Pro-D workshops and help schools connect to food and nutrition programs and services.

### Tobacco and Vapour Products Reduction Program

- ✓ Provides education sessions to students/classrooms and parents
- ✓ Facilitates training to educators (e.g. administration, teacher and counsellors)
- ✓ Promotes resources and teaching tools such as:
  - [Comprehensive School Health Vaping Action Guide](#) with support for implementation
  - [BC Lung Vaping Prevention Toolkit](#) for grades 5-7
  - [BC Lung Vaping Prevention/Cessation Toolkit](#) for grades 8-10
  - [Academy for Tobacco Prevention](#) for grades 4-7 (to order resources, see below)
  - [Vaping Infographics for Youth](#) outlining support pathways
  - Stopping smoking/vaping: [BC Smoking Cessation Program](#), [Quash](#) (interactive [app](#), 14-19 years), [QuitNow](#), [VGH Smoking Cessation Clinic](#)

For more information, contact [smokefree@vch.ca](mailto:smokefree@vch.ca) and visit [here](#).

### Dental Health

- ✓ Facilitates free and or low cost dental treatment for children whose families find dental services a financial barrier.
- ✓ Provides resources for student dental education.
- ✓ Universal Kindergarten dental screening, which occurs **every three years**, may occur in the **winter of 2022**.

### Pediatric Team

- ✓ Team includes Community Health Nursing, Occupational Therapy, and Physiotherapy.
- ✓ Provides school-based consultation for children aged 0-19 for nursing support and 5-19 years for occupational therapy and physical therapy.
- ✓ Provides educational in-services for school staff.
- ✓ Provides input into Individual Education Plans and school-based meetings to support inclusion in the school community.

## Appendix B: School Medical Management Resources 2021-2022

Anaphylaxis & Allergy Management	
Resource	Content
<a href="http://AllergyAware.ca">AllergyAware.ca</a>	Information on anaphylaxis including management of anaphylaxis and use of auto-injectors.
<a href="#">Anaphylaxis in Schools</a> (online course) by Allergyaware.ca	30 minute online course for teachers, administrators and other school personnel to understand basics of anaphylaxis, ways to reduce risks in a school setting, and recommended emergency treatment.
<a href="http://FoodAllergyCanada.ca">Food Allergy Canada</a>	Information on managing food allergies.
<a href="#">Anaphylaxis Policy</a> by the Province of British Columbia	BC Government website for school policies re: anaphylaxis, policies, procedures and training strategies.

Asthma Management	
Resource	Content
<a href="#">How to use your Spacer and Mask for Preschoolers</a> (video) by Canadian Lung Association	Video on how to help administer asthma reliever medications with a spacer and mask for young children.
<a href="#">Understanding Asthma</a> (website) by Asthma Canada	Brief introduction to asthma, how it affects your body, triggers, treatment and management.

Seizure Management	
Resource	Content
<a href="#">Safe &amp; Healthy Schools</a> by Province of British Columbia	Seizure action plan available for download.
<a href="#">Seizure First Aid</a> (video) by BC Epilepsy Society	How to react to a seizure video by BC Epilepsy Society
<a href="#">BC Epilepsy</a> (website)	Information on epilepsy and seizures including tips for teachers.
<a href="#">Taking Care of Seizures at School</a> (online course) on LearningHub.com	For school staff caring for children with seizures. 30-45 minute online course. <b>Instructions:</b> 1) Create a Learning Hub Account with your school email 2) Verify account 3) Search for course title or code 15977 4) Register course.



Diabetes Management	
Resource	Content
<a href="#">Diabetes Management in the School</a> by Province of British Columbia	Provincial standards for care of students living with diabetes at school. PDF of the <a href="#">Diabetes Support Plan available to download here</a> .
<a href="#">Guidelines for the Care of Students Living with Diabetes at School</a> by Diabetes Canada	Document which covers the guidelines for roles and responsibilities of everyone involved with the care of students living with diabetes at school. Reviews signs and symptoms of diabetes, impact of food and physical activity, treatment and management.
<a href="#">Type 1 Diabetes: The Basics for Teachers &amp; School Staff</a> (Video) by Canadian Paediatric Society	Canadian Paediatric Society video for basic information on Type 1 Diabetes.



## Appendix C: Additional Resources

### *Data Sources*

The following data sources provide information about your schools and district. Please consider reviewing these sources to inform your programs:

- Your district's [Middle Years Development Instrument](#) (MDI) report that sheds light on the thoughts, feelings and experiences of children in grade 4 to grade 8. This data can be used to inform policy and practice in your school community.
- Your district's [Adolescent Health Survey](#) (AHS) report that provides an evidence base of health behavior trends, emerging issues, and risk and protective factors for healthy development.
- Your district's [2020 School District Report](#) that includes the Ministry of Education's Student Satisfaction results.

### *VCH School Health Action Guides*

VCH public health staff can provide input and guidance to schools on a variety of health promotion topics including, but not limited to, physical activity, healthy eating, mental wellness, and reducing the harms associated with vaping. Refer to the action guides below for more information about these topic areas and ideas for addressing them using the Comprehensive School Health approach:

- [Physical Activity Action Guide](#)
- [Healthy Eating Action Guide](#)
- [Mental Wellness Action Guide](#)
- [Vaping Action Guide](#)

### *COVID-19 Public Health Guidance*

- [Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)

### *BC Ministry of Education Resources*

- [Key Principles & Strategies for K-12 Mental Health Promotion in Schools](#)
- [Mental Health in Schools Strategy](#)
- [K-12 Education Recovery Plan – June 17, 2021](#)

### *Mental & Physical Wellbeing*

- [erase](#) (Expect Respect and a Safe Education) hosts a range of mental health and well-being resources for students and families.
- [Mental Wellness](#) (Provincial Health Services Authority)
  - See resource list under "Child" and "Youth/Young Adult"
- [HereToHelp](#) (BC Partners for Mental Health and Substance Use Information)
- [Mental well-being during COVID-19](#) (BCCDC) offers tips for supporting mental wellbeing for children, youth and parents.
- The [Stigma Free COVID-19 Youth Wellness Toolkit](#) includes tips, checklists, activities (for gr. 4-6), and many more resources to support youth during this time.
- [Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators](#) (EASE) is a collection of evidence-informed anxiety prevention and resilience-building resources for use with students in grades K-7. (HealthyMindsBC):
  - was developed in B.C.
  - supports the goals of B.C.'s mental health strategy, A Pathway to Hope
  - aligns with B.C.'s curriculum
- The [TransLink Active Kids are Healthy Kids](#) infographic provides ideas for ways to incorporate more active travel into one's routine.

### *WorkSafe BC Resources*

- [Managing the mental health effects of COVID-19 in the workplace: A guide for employers](#)
- [Addressing the mental health effects of COVID-19 in the workplace: A guide for workers](#)