

# COVID-19 DECISION-MAKING GUIDE

## APRIL 19TH UPDATE

The following information is designed to provide the public with a greater understanding of the process Lethbridge School Division Board of Trustees and central administration use to determine if the Division can ease COVID-19 protocols in schools.

As always, the overriding principle is the safety of students, staff, the school community and the larger community. Each month the Board considers information in the following categories:

## CATEGORY 1: GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

- **Key question:** Are there changes from Alberta Health Services, Alberta Education, City of Lethbridge or Occupational Health and Safety that would suggest the Division needs to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?
- **Key Information**
  - Recent guidance from Alberta Health Services, Alberta Education, Occupational Health and Safety or other Government agencies.
    - The Alberta Government announced on March 22, 2021 that the province would not move to Step 3 (relaxation of restrictions) due to an increase in COVID-19 cases across the province and rising hospitalizations.
    - The Alberta Government announced on April 6 that there would be a return to Sept 1 (more restrictive) due to continued rising cases, concern with the co-variant spread, and rising hospitalization. (451 hospitalization (47 in ICU) and positivity rate of 9.39.
    - Alberta Health Services emphasizing that variants of concern are more contagious and numbers are rising.
    - Alberta Education made decision to move all grades 7-12 students to at-home learning in Calgary.

**Does this information suggest the Division should maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols currently in place?**

- The government's decision to move back to more restrictive measures (Step 1) due to rising case numbers, hospitalizations, and concern with the Covariant strains suggest that Lethbridge School Division should take a cautious approach at this time to MAINTAIN current COVID protocols.

## CATEGORY 2: COVID-19 CASES IN LETHBRIDGE

- **Key question:** Does community transmission information suggest the Division needs to maintain, enhance, or reduce COVID-19 protocols?
- **Key information:**
  - Active case counts in Lethbridge.
    - Trend in Lethbridge: Feb 7 (175); Feb 21 (205); Mar 7 (268); April 4 (515); April 18 (462)
    - Active Case Rates in Lethbridge (rates per 100,000): March 8 (276.2); March 21 (511.6); April 19 (459)
      - Although the ranking of Lethbridge for active case rates has fallen below some other communities in Alberta, this is primarily due to other communities having significant increases (not because Lethbridge has had significant decreases).

**Does this information suggest the Division should maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols currently in place?**

The high level of cases in Lethbridge suggests the Division should take a cautious approach and MAINTAIN current protocols. The division can consider enhancing protocols and addressing operational needs on a case-by-case basis (e.g. working with Alberta government to move some schools to Scenario 3 - at-home learning - or working with schools to move some grades/ portions of the student population to Scenario 3).

## CATEGORY 3: COVID-19 CASES IN SCHOOLS

- **Key question:** Does school COVID-19 information suggest the Division needs to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?
- **Key information:** As of April 18, 2021
  - 67 active COVID-19 cases in Lethbridge School Division, impacting 16 out of 23 schools.
  - 8 Schools in Outbreak status (5 or more cases)
  - Up to April 17, 34 staff, and 685 students have been quarantined. Number will rise substantially as 6 new cases have been identified in the last two days. since the data was compiled.

**Does this information suggest the Division should maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols currently in place?**

The continued high number of cases suggests that the Division should take a cautious approach and MAINTAIN current protocols.

## CATEGORY 4: ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS AND LEARNING

- **Key question:** Does organizational status information suggest the Division needs to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?

- **Key information:**
  - Number of staff mandated to isolate by Alberta Health Services.
    - In the month of March, 2,272 students and 200 staff were quarantined
    - Greater precaution being taken by families; anxiety associated with being identified as a close contact (we have had some students quarantine 4 times - over 50 days in isolation)
  - Ability to provide replacements when staff are ill, have COVID symptoms or mandated to isolate.
    - In March, up to 20 assistant substitute staff/day absences were not filled because subs not available
    - Throughout March some variability with filling teacher positions
    - Following the return to school after the Easter break, there was capacity for filling positions. As we progress into the second week back to school, increasing difficulty with covering absent assistants has resulted in between 3 and 6 positions unfilled. It is anticipated this will increase. We are also starting to experience difficulty with filling teacher absences. We have recently had 3-4 positions each day remain unfilled.

**Does this information suggest the Division should maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols currently in place?**

The continued and increasing challenge of being able to secure substitute assistants on a regular basis as well as teacher substitutes suggests that the Division should MAINTAIN current protocols. The division can consider enhancing protocols and addressing operational needs on a case-by-case basis (e.g. working with Alberta government to move some schools to Scenario 3 - at-home learning - or working with schools to move some grades/ portions of the student population to Scenario 3).

## CATEGORY 5: OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- **Key question:** Are there other factors the Division needs to consider when deciding if we should maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?

Other factors are considered on a case-by-case basis.

Overall, all levels of schools (elementary, middle, and high school) have indicated that staff are feeling vulnerable with the rise in cases in Lethbridge, especially the prevalence of co-variant cases. Several staff have been quarantined on a number of occasions and are wanting to avoid further quarantine experiences, as are students and families. Staff, overall, are not desirous of changes that may involve more risk. There are exceptions to this perspective. Some schools are experiencing attendance challenges with parents becoming reluctant to send their children to school for two reasons: anxious about the risk of contracting COVID-19, especially with the covariant rise, and anxious about having to be quarantined again if someone in the class tests positive. There has been increasing pressure to make exceptions beyond the last pivot point and provide learning at home.