

COVID-19 DECISION-MAKING GUIDE

JANUARY 25 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

Has Alberta Health Services provided any new direction or guidance?

- Currently there are 1191 hospitalizations (107 in ICU), with a positivity rate of 36.7% the current presentation of COVID-19 is still higher than it has been in the past. Since testing and identification of COVID-19 has moved to higher risk populations we have not received the same level of support to identify COVID-19 in our schools.

Has Alberta Education provided any new direction or guidance?

- Alberta Education updated the Alberta COVID-19 Guidance for Schools (K-12) on Jan. 7, 2022: [GUIDANCE](#)

Has OH&S provided any new direction or guidance?

- The Vaccination Procedure addresses OH & S requirements for instituting measures to keep a safe work place.

Other guidelines (ASAA for example)

- In school sport practices and inter-school games can occur. It is strongly recommended that all participants go through screening before participating in activities.
- All sport competitions are operating.
- There are some specific guidelines for spectators if a school division applies the REP. The restrictions can be enhanced to suit local context. Majority of school divisions in Zone 6 are not permitting spectator access at the time of this update. Schools are challenged with capacity to stay open, given absenteeism percentages.
- Coaches and trainers have to adhere to masking and physical distancing, and individuals not participating in physical activity such as coaches and trainers wear masks at all times
- Physical Distancing: AHS Guidelines suggest 2 m distancing to be followed on the sideline and when not in competition
- Exception: Coaches or trainers may enter physical distancing space for brief interactions with participants to correct form or technique.
- Masks: masks for athletes are encouraged to be worn at all times when entering facilities or accessing public spaces; athletes can only take off their masks when engaged in physical activity
- Change rooms: Access must be limited including accelerated arrival/departure, for emergencies and for washroom use

CATEGORY 2: COVID-19 CASES IN LETHBRIDGE

How many active cases are there in Lethbridge?

- o Active case counts in Lethbridge.
 - Trend in Lethbridge: Feb. 21 (205); March 21 (502); April 18 (462); May 24 (201); Sept. 27 (451); Oct. 29 (282); Nov. 19 (139); Dec. 10 (84), Jan. 21 (1,305)

CATEGORY 3: COVID-19 CASES IN SCHOOLS

Are there known COVID-19 diagnosis in any schools?

- AHS is no longer conducting contact tracing or reporting positive cases within schools as of early January. Students and staff are to utilize the AHS Daily Checklist to determine the course of action for their situation. The checklist was updated Jan. 7, 2022.

Has AHS mandated that staff in any school isolate due to possible exposure at school?

- AHS is no longer conducting contact tracing or reporting positive cases within schools as of early January.
- Close contacts are recommended to rapid test and monitor for possible symptoms our schools follow the daily checklist.

Has AHS mandated that students isolate in any school?

- Only positive cases are required to stay home. Staff and students are all encouraged to stay home if they are symptomatic (sick).

Is AHS conducting contract tracing in any schools?

- AHS is no longer conducting contact tracing or reporting positive cases within schools as of early January.

Is there evidence of COVID-19 transmission within schools?

- AHS no longer provides contact tracing to determine if COVID is being transmitted at school.

CATEGORY 4: ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS AND LEARNING

Insurance – has our insurer given any specific guidelines and/or restrictions that affect the division’s position of potential liability?

- Recent: Insurer provided a Memo to the school division on January 24 that stated, “they encourage Lethbridge School Division to require universal indoor masking for students in the current insurance policy term, as per the latest Health Canada, AHS and Canadian Medical Association guidance.”
- November: Insurer advised that school divisions should put Vaccination procedures in place. Not doing so puts the Division in jeopardy for additional insurance fees (surcharge) or being removed as a member of the insurance cohort (USIC - Urban Schools Insurance Consortium). All members now have a procedure or policy in place. Standard of due care/diligence in the education sector established by number of jurisdictions that have a procedure provincially and nationally, and recommendations by Ministers of Education and Health as well as the Chief Medical Officer.

How does the student absenteeism rate compare to a non-COVID year?

- The absenteeism is higher than a non-COVID year. Last week January 17-21 was higher than in 18/19, Thursday had more than 900 absences, Friday was close to 1200 absences. Not all these absences are connected to illness or COVID. In 18/19 there were 700 absences on the Thursday and 500 on Friday. It is important to note that Fridays typically do have more excused absences than the rest of the week

How does the staff absenteeism rate compare to a non-COVID year; is it impacting instruction?

- January (until Jan. 19, 2022) - increase of 44.15 absences per day for illness or COVID symptoms compared to January 2021

Overall, have schools communicated that they support change and have the capacity to assume the additional responsibilities that come with co- and extra-curricular activities?

- Secondary Administrators recognize that the primary consideration and focus in extra-curricular pursuits is student participation, as well as health and well-being of students and the school community. The Restrictions Exemption Program was initiated in September for outdoor sport. Application of the restriction exemption program subsequently moved to indoor sport at the secondary level with strategies specific to the sport or activity developed by schools. Specific strategies started with restricting the number of spectators for each participant (two spectators/ participant). In December schools moved to other strategies for some seasonal events such as one-third capacity of the building to increase the number of spectators per participant. Following Winter break and the sudden spike in cases, secondary school administrators decided to restrict inter-school activity and spectators (Jan. 10 – 16). Inter-school activity was re-instated the week of January 17. Competitive games and tournaments were permitted. On January 27, administrators decided to allow two spectators for each participant engaged in an extra-curricular activity, except for tournaments. School administrators will continue to monitor the trend of COVID, including any new variants, and determine their capacity for spectators and continued implementation of inter-school competition.

CATEGORY 5: OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

What is the Standard of Care owed to students and staff?

- Guided by MOH, wellness standards, OHS, impact on capacity to maintain Standard of Care required during the pandemic

Political Pressure/ Parent Pressure considerations

- Political pressure/parent pressure primarily targeting two areas (1) wearing of masks (2) not allowing spectators into gyms.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

Are there changes from Alberta Health Services, Alberta Education or OH&S that would suggest we need to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?

- Changes have been implemented as they arise (e.g. masks for all grades). Contact notification is no longer in place.

Does community transmission information suggest we need to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?

- Maintain all protocols (social distancing, mask wearing, hand washing). Carefully consider whether schools have the capacity to have spectators (staff and absenteeism rates/ consideration of safety for students and volunteers). At the time of this report Lethbridge has a record high for number of positive cases.

Does school COVID-19 information suggest we need to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?

- Maintain.

Does organizational status information suggest we need to maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?

- Recently our COVID-19 numbers have begun to decrease in Lethbridge and across the province, and we appear to be at or near the end of the fourth wave.

Are there other factors we need to consider when deciding if we should maintain, enhance or reduce COVID-19 protocols?

- Substitute staff also can get sick and this can impact our ability to staff.