

COVID-19 DECISION-MAKING GUIDE

FEBRUARY 15 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.

Lethbridge
SCHOOL DIVISION

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 1,566 hospitalizations (127 in ICU), with a positivity rate of 31.7% the current presentation of COVID-19 in Lethbridge is similar to early January. 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?

- Yes, Alberta Education made an announcement on February 8th. Adriana LaGrange indicated a downward trend in the number of Alberta schools shifting to at home learning over the last few weeks. “Effective Monday February 14th, the masking requirements in CMOH 22-2021 will be removed and as such there will be no masking requirements for any students in schools or on school buses. At this time, masking will still be required for adults including teachers, administrators and other school staff including school bus drivers.”
- Although not written in the “Guidance for Schools (K-12) and School Buses” document updated February 12, the following is written on the Alberta government website updating education protocols as well as the revised Alberta COVID “Parent Guide” updated February 12: School Authorities cannot require parents, volunteers, spectators or other non-school employees to show proof of vaccination. Lethbridge School Division 700.3.4 Hazard Control – Independent Contractors, Tenants, Practicum Students, Guests – COVID 19 Vaccine Status Procedure no longer supported and has been removed.

Has OH&S provided any new direction or guidance?

- Ongoing reflection on use of mitigation measures to keep a safe work place that meets the standards of a changing context.

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.
- REP no longer in place.
- Individuals over the age of 12 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: If over the age of 12, 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); Feb. 11 (798).

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.

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 AHS 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 re-evaluating position on protocols given recent government decisions.
- January: 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 put a procedure or policy in place. Standard of due care/diligence in the education sector at that time, 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. The week of the February 7-11th came down quite significantly from the week prior (on the 4th we had over 1200 absences K-6 and on the 11th we had 1000 absences K-6). It is important to note that absences this last week came more in line with last year at this time. We are still 400 student absences more than in a non-COVID year at our highest absence day (Feb. 11).
- 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?

- February - (until Feb 9, 2022) increase of 45 absences per day for illness or COVID symptoms compared to February, 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?

- History: 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. Following the government announcement February 9, 2022 with “Stages” of protocol withdrawal, Stage 1 lifted REP and facility capacity restrictions. Masks for all spectators over age 12 remains in place. This will be removed if the province moves to Stage 2 that removes mask requirements at all ages.
- Updates:
- The REP applied to co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and placed limits on audience members for performances and spectators for sports. This past week, the REP was lifted by the Alberta government, and as of Wednesday, February 9, 2022, people attending events inside our schools no longer need to provide proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test.

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

- Supporting learning environments to be respectful of masking choice
- Supporting parent and outside community involvement while maintaining safety within the school

Are there other factors to consider?

- Lethbridge vaccination rates for school aged children (2 doses) – Feb. 13:
- West Lethbridge – ages 5-11 = 27.6% / ages 12-19 = 90%
- North Lethbridge - ages 5 – 11 = 17.1% / ages 12-19 = 82.1%
- South Lethbridge - ages 5 – 11 = 20.7% / ages 12 – 19 = 86.2%

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. removal of masking). Contact notification is no longer in place.

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

- We do not current have available data to determine community transmission.

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

- Current COVID-19 school data is not available.

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.