

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

School-based Public Health Measures in Select Jurisdictions and Guidance from Public Health Organizations

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Key Findings

- Findings for most jurisdictions pertain to the 2021/2022 school year (i.e., capture the most recent status of school-based measures in the 2021/2022 school year). Approaches to public health measures for the 2022/23 school year is currently available for New Zealand, Australia, and California. New Zealand and Australia are located in the Southern hemisphere, where the seasonal respiratory virus and school seasons typically start earlier than in Ontario. These two jurisdictions were found to have recent school-based public health measure updates that are informed by the current community COVID-19 burden.
- Between February and May 2022, most jurisdictions removed temporary requirements for school-based public health measures that were introduced in response to COVID-19 including masking, cohorting, testing, and screening. However, several of these measures are still recommended (e.g., masking in Nova Scotia, Australia, and New Zealand) or made available (e.g., rapid antigen testing in Quebec, Manitoba, Australia, and California and masks for students in New Zealand and California) in some jurisdictions. Further, many jurisdictions included caveats around the potential need to update guidance based on the COVID-19 situation.
- Ventilation, hand hygiene, and routine cleaning were the most commonly reported permanent public health measures that continue to be used.
- The use of student absenteeism data to identify concerning trends and inform public health action is the most common school public health surveillance measure that remains in use across five jurisdictions (i.e., Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Alberta, and New York State).
- The United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends schools implement permanent public health measures to help prevent against infectious diseases such as COVID-19, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and gastrointestinal infections.
 - In addition, the local context and equity at both the individual and school levels should be considered in decision-making to ensure the needed resources are provided to all within the district and community.
 - The CDC is also expected to ease their COVID-19 guidelines for schools in August 2022 by removing quarantine requirements for close contacts with COVID-19 cases, six-foot distancing, and 'test to stay'.

Objectives and Scope

- This document includes a scan of the most recent, publicly available school-based public health measures and guidance with a focus on prevention of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections in various jurisdictions. Findings pertain to the 2021/2022 school year (e.g., capture the most recent status of school-based measures in the 2021/2022 school year), or the 2022/2023 school-based public health measures, if available.
- This scan reports on public health measures including both temporary measures that were implemented in response to COVID-19 (e.g., masking, screening, and testing) and permanent measures that support the ongoing operations of school activities irrespective of the COVID-19 pandemic, though enhancements to these measures may have been implemented during the pandemic response (e.g., ventilation, vaccination, good hygiene, and routine cleaning).¹
- The following are out of scope for this document: review of the evidence of the impact of each measure in the school setting; and detailed scan of community public health measures outside of schools.

Background

Ontario Kindergarten to grade 12 students have experienced multiple, prolonged periods without in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic,² and there is evidence demonstrating related harms.³ Given the importance of in-person schooling for the learning and overall well-being of children, it is important to balance the harms of losing in-person learning between reducing transmission in kids. However, efforts to reduce transmission is still very important, especially given lower vaccination rates in kids. Public Health Ontario (PHO) has emphasized optimizing multiple layers of prevention in schools, including masking, with a view to reducing Omicron transmission risk to limit and mitigate the harms of disruption to in-person learning², and as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, consider less restrictive and more equitable measures for achieving response goals that are informed by epidemiological trends.⁴

Provincial school-based measures that remained in place in Ontario until the end of the 2021/22 school year include self-screening, enhanced cleaning practices, improved ventilation in all classrooms, publicly funded rapid antigen tests for students to use at home, isolation for individuals who become ill at school, availability of hand sanitizer throughout the school, promotion of hand hygiene, and distribution of HEPA filter units and other ventilation devices to schools.⁵ Individuals are also required to isolate for five days if they have COVID-19 symptoms or test positive for COVID-19.⁶ Like many jurisdictions, Ontario continues to experience resurgence as ongoing emergence of global variants. In the Southern Hemisphere (i.e., Australia), laboratory-confirmed influenza is exceeding previous 5-year averages.⁷ Ontario is among the many jurisdictions preparing for the 2022/23 respiratory virus season, including likely co-circulation of COVID-19 and influenza. In this context of return to school in fall 2022, this scan was undertaken to understand how other jurisdictions and public health organizations are currently approaching school-based public health measures.

Methods

This environmental scan was informed by previous Public Health Ontario (PHO) reports, scanning of key government websites, as well as general Google searches for items related to public health measures in schools. A formal bibliographic database search was not conducted due to time constraints; thus, some relevant articles may not be included.

Results

Below is a summary of the most recent, publicly available school-based public health measures with a focus on prevention of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections in select jurisdictions as of July 12, 2022. The context in which the public health measures are mentioned (e.g., which infection(s) the measures are intended to prevent) is mentioned, if available.

School-Based Public Health Measures for the 2021/2022 School Year

Findings in this section pertain to the 2021/2022 school year (e.g., capture the most recent status of school-based measures in the 2021/2022 school year).

CANADA

QUEBEC

- Masking is not required in a school setting nor on school transportation;⁸ however, it continues to be recommended for close contacts, individuals who have been recently infected with COVID-19, and those who are vulnerable due to health conditions or age.⁹
- Rapid antigen tests are available in all preschools and elementary and secondary schools in Quebec to test students and staff that develop COVID-19 symptoms at school. ¹⁰ Rapid antigen testing kits were distributed to preschool and elementary school students for at-home use.¹⁰
- Any individual who tests positive for COVID-19 must self-isolate for 5 days.¹¹
- Air quality interventions include the installation of 77,269 (86%) comfort parameter sensors and the delivery of 1,204 air exchangers to classrooms with persistent air quality problems.¹²

MANITOBA

- Effective March 15, 2022, masking and cohorting are no longer required in schools.¹³
- Daily self-screening of students and staff is expected.¹³
- Rapid antigen tests are available for in-school use when individuals develop symptoms. Distribution of rapid antigen testing kits to students is advised.¹³ Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 must self-isolate for 5 days.¹⁴
- Student and staff absenteeism is monitored in consultation with public health authorities for concerning patterns or trends, and community notification letters are distributed as required. No information for what is considered a ‘concerning’ level of absenteeism was found.¹³
- Schools are required to inspect their ventilation systems and take actions as required. If the ventilation system has not been inspected, schools are advised to assess and identify rooms designated for occupancy that do not have a fresh air supply. Schools must take steps to introduce and maintain a clean air supply in these identified rooms.¹³
- Routine cleaning, staying home while sick, and hand hygiene continue to be used.¹³

NEW BRUNSWICK

- Effective March 14, 2022, masking is no longer required in public schools.¹⁵
- Self-reporting cases of COVID-19 is no longer required for contact tracing purposes; however, school absenteeism data continues to be monitored by public health authorities.¹⁵
- It was reported that integrated ventilation systems will be installed in schools in 2022.¹⁶ The continued use of portable HEPA filters is advised in schools without these ventilation systems in place.¹⁵
- Routine cleaning, staying home when sick, and good hygiene (e.g., hand washing) continue to be used.¹⁵

NOVA SCOTIA

- Effective May 24, 2022, masking in schools is no longer required but is strongly recommended in addition to self-screening for symptoms using the COVID-19 Daily Checklist.¹⁷
- Outdoor learning continues to be prioritized, including community excursions and playtime for Pre-primary Program students.¹⁷
- To reduce the risk of transmission of many illnesses, including COVID-19,¹⁸ Nova Scotia public health authorities continue to monitor school absenteeism and community epidemiology. No information regarding thresholds nor follow up action was found.¹⁷
- COVID-19 vaccination is encouraged.¹⁷
- Cleaning and disinfecting, staying home when sick, and hand hygiene continue to be used.¹⁷

BRITISH COLUMBIA (BC)

- Effective March 2022, masking is no longer required in schools. Increasing the amount of time students spend outdoors is no longer described as a necessary measure.¹⁹
- As of March 10, 2022, the Ministry of Health and BC Centre for Disease Control maintains the recommendation that both students and staff be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 as well as keep up to date on all routine and school based immunizations against other communicable diseases.¹⁹
- Daily self-screening of students and staff is advised.¹⁹
- Cleaning and good hygiene (e.g., hand hygiene, coughing into an elbow or tissue) continue to be used.¹⁹

ALBERTA

- Masking, cohorting, and screening are no longer required in schools.²⁰
- Monitoring of school absenteeism data will be used by public health authorities to identify illness outbreaks.²¹ Daily absence reporting by school will no longer be posted publicly.
- Effective June 30, 2022, school authorities will be able to shift to at-home learning without ministerial approval.²¹

SASKATCHEWAN

- Effective February 28, 2022, masking in schools is no longer required.²²
- For individuals that test positive for COVID-19, self-isolation for five days is strongly recommended.²³

YUKON

- Effective May 24, 2022, students and staff are no longer required to wear masks in schools nor on school buses.²⁴
- Physical distancing measures are applicable to staff only, in which they are required to maintain a 2-metre distance from others.²⁴
- Self-screening of symptoms prior to attending class is recommended for everyone, in addition to obtaining a second dose of the vaccine.²⁴
- Natural ventilation is encouraged if weather permits and the use of HEPA filters is recommended in circumstances involving poor ventilation.²⁴
- Regular cleaning practices, staying home when sick, and good hygiene (e.g., hand washing, coughing into an elbow) continue to be used.²⁴

UNITED STATES (US)

NEW YORK STATE

- Masking and contact tracing are no longer required in schools.^{25,26}
- According to the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH),²⁷ Office of School COVID Support, schools are encouraged (not required) to continue to utilize the NYSDOH Isolation & Quarantine Guidance for Schools²⁸ and CDC Operational Guidance for K-12 Schools to Support Safe In-Person Learning.²⁹ This guidance includes the following:
- Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 or are symptomatic and waiting test results (PCR or antigen test) must isolate for five days (unless they receive a negative test result).²⁸
 - Exposed or potentially exposed (e.g., in a classroom with an infected individual for at least 15 minutes) students, teachers, and staff who must quarantine because they are not up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines (i.e., are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated, or are eligible for a booster(s) but have not received them) can attend or work at school and school-based extracurricular activities during the quarantine period if they undergo

recommended testing (i.e., test to stay program). However, these individuals must continue to quarantine as otherwise required outside of school.

- Effective July 1, 2022:²⁷
 - Schools are no longer required to test unvaccinated teachers and staff weekly.
 - Schools are not required to offer weekly screening testing to students.
 - Although this program is no longer in effect, NYSDOH recognizes that COVID testing (PCR or antigen test) is a recommended prevention strategy and encourages schools to continue supporting access to COVID-19 screening and rapid antigen or PCR testing for students, teachers, and staff.
- It has been advised by NYSDOH that improved indoor air quality has been recognized as an important factor in protecting against the spread of COVID-19 in schools and other buildings and should be taken into consideration.²⁷
- New York school districts must provide daily data on the number of people in the school who have tested positive for COVID-19 to NYSDOH. Data is collected from K-12 public schools on each operational day.²⁷
 - Each school is to submit data for the current operational day between the hours of 7am and 5pm at which time, the data is aggregated at the school and district levels.³⁰ The updated data from the previous day will be available the following morning and displayed on the School COVID Report Card website.³⁰

ENGLAND

- Effective February 2022, testing and masking are no longer required.^{31,32}
- The United Kingdom government still advises in general to get vaccinated, meet outdoors, wear a face covering in crowded spaces, stay home when unwell, get tested if COVID-19 symptoms are present, and wash hands to reduce the risk of getting and passing along COVID-19.³²
 - Specifically in the educational setting, the UK government has committed funding to support good ventilation by providing CO2 monitors to state-funded education settings and HEPA cleaning units for a small number of schools with poor ventilation.³²

Jurisdictions with Updated Public Health Measures for the 2022/23 School Year

The following jurisdictions updated their school-based public health measure documents for the 2022/2023 school year.

AUSTRALIA

NEW SOUTH WALES (NSW) REGION IN AUSTRALIA

- Masking, cohorting, and testing are no longer required in elementary and secondary schools.³³ The Minister for Education and Early Learning strongly encourages indoor masking throughout the first four weeks of Term 3 (i.e. July 2022) to minimize risk of respiratory disease transmission and keep schools operational.³⁴
- Masking is required when working with students with disabilities in schools for specific purposes and support units. Masking also continues to be required on school transport, which is applicable to students aged 12 years and older, and staff.³⁴
- Rapid antigen testing kits were provided to students and staff at the beginning of Term 3 (i.e., early July 2022) to use if symptomatic or if they were in close contact to a positive case. Individuals that test positive for COVID-19 must report their rapid antigen test results through the Service NSW website or app, in addition to notifying the school and isolating for a 7 day period. Furthermore, those who have tested negative, but are symptomatic must not return to school until symptoms cease or upon providing medical documentation outlining symptoms arising from another illness. Individuals who have been identified as close contacts and are not symptomatic are able to attend school, with the exception of schools for specific purposes or support units, in adherence to NSW Health guidelines which include:
 - Notification to school authorities.
 - Conducting a daily rapid antigen test for 5 school days.
 - Mandatory indoor masking in a secondary school setting for 5 school days (indoor masking is recommended, not mandatory, for primary school students).³⁴
- Vaccination is strongly recommended for all students and staff. Unvaccinated staff may return to work beginning August 1, 2022, as it is no longer required that all staff members have two vaccine doses. This does not apply to individuals that work with or visit students with disabilities in schools for specific purposes (i.e., individuals in this situation must have two vaccine doses).³⁴
- Natural ventilation and mechanical ventilation measures are to be utilized in order to maximize fresh airflow. Outdoor learning spaces are encouraged when weather permits. Air purification systems are to be provided during instances of poor air quality such as exposure to bushfire smoke.³⁵

VICTORIA

- As of July 18, 2022, all Victoria government schools are required to follow the School Operations Guide outlining the COVIDSafe measures for schools which focus on the 3 Vs (i.e., ventilation, vaccination, and vital COVIDSafe steps) as described below:
 - Vaccination:³⁶ vaccinations are strongly recommended for all school staff and students aged 5 and over who are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.
 - As of June 25, 2022, all school staff including contractors, volunteers and visitors are no longer required to meet COVID-19 vaccination requirements to attend work.
 - All staff in specialist schools including contractors, volunteers, and visitors are required to be vaccinated.
 - Ventilation: all schools have been allocated with an air purifier for classrooms and high risk spaces provided by the Department of Education and Training.³⁶ Schools are strongly encouraged to use air purifiers alongside natural and mechanical ventilation. Information on maximising ventilation as well as appropriate use and placement of air purifiers can be found on the Department's Ventilation and Air Purification policy.³⁷
 - Vital COVIDSafe steps:³⁶
 - Face masks are strongly recommended by the Department of Health in indoor settings including classrooms. Exceptions to the recommendation applies in circumstances when clear communication or a specific activity requires the removal of the mask. Masks are not required to be worn outdoors but can be when physical distancing is not possible.³⁶
 - Face masks are mandatory at school for individuals 8 years old and over who live in the same household as someone who is positive.
 - Schools have been supplied with a stock of N95 masks suitable for adults and children, surgical masks for staff and students in secondary schools, and child-size surgical masks for students in primary schools in order to ensure that everyone has a selection of options to choose from.³⁶
 - Physical distancing: strategies to support physical distancing among students and staff should continue to be implemented where possible.³⁶
 - Regular hand hygiene: all staff and students should practice good hand hygiene upon arrival to school, before and after eating, after blowing their nose, sneezing or using the toilet. Staff should supervise younger students and assist where required.
 - Testing: the Victorian government is providing up to three deliveries of rapid antigen test in Term 3 (July – September) and again in Term 4 (October to December) to schools.^{36,38}
 - Testing: rapid antigen tests are recommended for school students and staff when symptomatic. Individuals that live in the same household as a positive case are required to test negative using a rapid antigen test, if they are attending or working at schools.³⁶

- Testing and Isolation: positive tests are to be reported through the department of health system or via the Coronavirus hotline. Staff and students must also report a positive result to their school so that the school can record their absence while in isolation for a period of 7 days.³⁶
- Staff and students who have recovered from COVID-19 are not required to get tested or isolate/quarantine if the exposure to a case occurred within 4 weeks of ending their isolation period.³⁶

NEW ZEALAND

- New Zealand uses the COVID-19 Protection framework (traffic light system), and as of June 30, 2022,³⁹ the country will remain at the Orange traffic light setting.⁴⁰ With hospitals under pressure from flu and COVID-19, enhanced measures for schools are being implemented to help reduce colds, flu and COVID-19 from spreading during the winter months:
 - Face masks are encouraged for all individuals when inside at school and are required on Ministry of Education funded school transport for individuals aged 12 years or older.
 - 50 child-size medical-grade masks are made available to every Year 4 to 7 student (i.e., students aged 8 – 12 years old) in New Zealand until the end of 2022.³⁹
 - Adult-sized masks are offered to all school children from Year 8 and up (i.e., students aged 12 years and older).³⁹ 20,000 to 30,000 masks are provided each week to students and school staff.
 - Any individual who experiences new onset of symptoms after recovering from a previous COVID-19 infection (more than 29 days prior) should get a test and will need to isolate for 7 days, if they test positive for COVID-19.
 - Extra funding is provided to schools and early childhood services to support better ventilation over the winter months to maintain healthy levels of heating and ventilation to help reduce colds, flu and COVID-19 from spreading. To assist with ventilation concerns during the winter months, every school in New Zealand has already been provided with CO₂ monitors to help identify spaces where maintaining good ventilation is challenging and more than 8,000 air cleaners were provided to help improve ventilation in these areas.
 - Sustained CO₂ levels less than 800 ppm indicate that the space is well-ventilated. Guidance on “Assessing Ventilation” has been provided to help schools monitor and assess CO₂ levels as well as what to do to reduce CO₂ levels.⁴¹

UNITED STATES (US)

CALIFORNIA

- In alignment with the state's SMARTER plan, California will continue to provide resources – including COVID-19 antigen tests and masks to students – to support safe, in-person learning in K-12 schools and mitigate the spread of COVID-19.⁴²
- Effective July 1, 2022, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) published its COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools to Support Safe In-Person Learning for the 2022-2023 School Year.⁴² Although there is currently no state-wide mask mandate in schools,⁴³ this guidance states that when determining whether a local universal indoor masking requirement should be maintained or established in K-12 school settings, California affirms the authority of local health departments and local educational agencies to maintain (e.g., handwashing and routine facility cleaning) or establish additional measures in their respective jurisdictions based on the following considerations:⁴²
 - CDC community level indicators of COVID-19 and their trajectory;
 - COVID-19 vaccination rate in the community and among students, teachers, and staff;
 - Local COVID-19 outbreaks or transmission patterns;
 - Indoor air quality at relevant facilities;
 - Availability and accessibility of resources, including masks and tests;
 - CDPH recommends that antigen tests be considered the primary option for detecting COVID-19 in schools, compared to PCR tests.⁴²
 - CDPH recommends that high-quality and well-fitting masks,⁴⁴ remain highly effective tool to protect against transmission of COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens. Schools must develop and implement local protocols to provide masks to students who inadvertently fail to bring a face covering to school and desire to use one.
 - Ability to provide therapeutics in a timely and equitable manner as they become available;
 - Equity considerations, including populations disproportionately impacted by and exposed to COVID-19;
 - Local demographics, including serving specialized populations of individuals at high risk of severe disease and immunocompromised populations.

School-based Guidance on Public Health Measures from Public Health Organizations

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and CDC were scanned for guidance on school-based public health measures. No recent guidance was found from ECDC or WHO. The guidance from the CDC is summarized below.²⁹

The CDC provides operational guidance for K-12 schools and early care and education programs, which was updated on May 27th, 2022. Strategies for everyday operations include staying up to date on vaccinations, having proper ventilation systems, reinforcing proper hand washing and covering coughs and sneezes, and regular cleaning and disinfection at least once a day. Staying home when sick was also listed and specifically mentioned other infectious diseases other than COVID-19 such as influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and gastrointestinal infections. CDC recommends that people with symptoms should stay home and get tested for COVID-19 and schools should have non-punitive and supportive paid sick leave policies and practices to encourage staying home when sick.

In addition, COVID-19 Community Levels and associated prevention strategies were included such as masking, testing, cohorting, ventilation improvements, contact tracing, and quarantine. COVID-19 Community Levels are a classification of low, medium, or high based on COVID-19 hospitalization rates, healthcare burden, and COVID-19 cases. Schools should follow guidance based on the COVID-19 Community Level classification in which they are located. These community level public health measures were also recommended to be considered for high-risk activities/situations that include sports, band, choir, theater, school clubs, and K-12 residential dorms and overnight childcare.

There were also considerations for prioritizing strategies that consider the local context such as age of population served, availability of resources, communities served, pediatric-specific healthcare capacity, and students with disabilities. The CDC recommends that equity at both the individual and school levels should be considered in all decision making to ensure the needed resources are provided to all within the district and community.

The CDC is also expected to ease their COVID-19 guidelines for schools in August 2022 by removing quarantine requirements for people exposed to COVID-19 and instead recommend wearing a mask and testing at least five days after exposure. Also, they will no longer recommend maintaining a six-foot distance and are expected to remove the 'test to stay' for students and teachers after close contact with a COVID-19 patient.⁴⁵

Discussion

- Between February and May 2022, most jurisdictions removed temporary school-based public health measures that were implemented in response to COVID-19 including masking, cohorting, testing, and screening. However, several of these measures are still recommended (e.g., masking in Nova Scotia, Australia, and New Zealand) or made available (e.g., rapid antigen testing in Quebec, Manitoba, Australia, and California and masks for students in New Zealand and California) in some jurisdictions. Further, many jurisdictions (e.g., Quebec, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Alberta, Yukon,) included caveats around the potential need to update guidance as needed based on the COVID-19 situation.^{8,13,17,19,20,24}
- Absenteeism surveillance – the use of student absenteeism data to identify concerning trends and inform public health action – remains in use across some jurisdictions (e.g., Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Alberta, and New York State). Thresholds to define concerning trends were not found in this scan. Furthermore, validation and/or assessment of usefulness of this data source was out of scope for this scan. For a more detailed, earlier scan focused on use of school absenteeism data to inform public health measures in schools, please refer to a previous PHO environmental scan.⁴⁶
- This scan focused on recent public health measures for the 2021/22 or 2022/23 school years. As such, some permanent measures (e.g., ventilation, environmental cleaning) that were implemented prior to the 2021/22 school year in some jurisdictions may not have been captured in this scan (e.g., if these measures were not recently updated nor included in any recently published webpages).
- Quantitative reporting on measures aimed at improving air quality was found for two jurisdictions: the government of Quebec reported installing 77,269 comfort parameter sensors and delivering 1,204 air exchangers to classrooms, while New Zealand reported providing a CO₂ monitor to every school and delivering 8,000 air cleaners to schools where maintaining good ventilation is challenging. It is important to note; however, that this scan may not have captured reporting of relevant initiatives for all jurisdictions where available, as reporting was not the focus of this scan.
- Descriptions of public health measures in most jurisdictions refer to the 2021/22 school year and are specific to COVID-19. However, New Zealand, Australia, and California have both published their approaches for the 2022/23 school year. New Zealand highlights measures being implemented to prevent COVID-19, influenza, and colds, while California’s guidance is also not specific to preventing just COVID-19 transmission in schools. It may be helpful to monitor updated approaches to public health measures in other jurisdictions for the return of school in the fall and as the epidemiology for infectious diseases, including COVID-19, evolves.
- In terms of guidance from the CDC on their COVID-19 Community Levels, these classifications are based on higher per capita numbers of nurses, hospital beds, and critical care beds when compared to Ontario. Therefore, using US thresholds for per-capita hospitalization rates or percentage of beds occupied by COVID-19 patients will likely lead to negative impacts to Ontario’s healthcare system.⁴⁷

Implications for Practice

- Many of the jurisdictions included in this scan have continued to support ongoing (or “permanent”) public health measures in schools. As Ontario prepares for the 2022/2023 K-12 school year, consideration can be given to how to optimize permanent public health measures in schools, including measures related to ventilation / indoor air quality, hand hygiene and environmental cleaning and disinfection. In addition, supporting accessible, equitable options for vaccination for students, staff and families (against COVID-19, influenza and other vaccine-preventable diseases, as recommended and eligible), has the potential to help limit preventable illness and illness-related disruption to students, schools and families.
- To complement permanent public health measures in schools, consideration of the role of less restrictive temporary public health measures (e.g., indoor masking, screening), has the potential to further limit the introduction and spread of COVID-19 and other infections at times of increased community transmission. For example, in the Southern Hemisphere, indoor masking continues to be encouraged or required in school settings at this time.
- Consideration of when and how to modify public health measures in Ontario schools should incorporate many factors, and be informed by continuous monitoring of the evolving epidemiology of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses and their health system impacts, and evidence on relevant public health measures in the broader community, as well as in school settings. Considerations relevant to public health measures in schools can also be supported by ethical frameworks,^{48,49} as well as health equity considerations to anticipate and mitigate unfair, disproportionate negative consequences for some groups.
- Previous reports have highlighted that school closures to in-person learning are associated with mental health harms³ and educational attainment harms, amplifying existing inequities for marginalized groups.⁵⁰ A layered approach to public health measures in schools, and in the community, can help sustain in-person learning, while minimizing the potential harms and disruption associated with preventable illness due to COVID-19 and other infections.
- In general, as part of planning for potential future scenarios, considerations on criteria for reinstating public health measures in a variety of settings and preparing public and key stakeholders (e.g., students, education staff, families, school boards and education decision-makers) to adapt and/or re-implement measures should be done using evidence-informed approaches from behavioural science and for risk communication.

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