

## COVID-19 Updates

*Over the recent weeks, the public health context in Manitoba has rapidly evolved with the emergence of the omicron variant of COVID-19. Please find below an update on information received from end of December 2021 to January 4, 2022.*

### Rapid Antigen Tests - K to 6

Manitoba Education has been working with public health in response to the spread of omicron, including the provincial roll-out of rapid antigen tests, just before the break, for students in Kindergarten to Grade 6.

A letter was received from Manitoba Education on December 21. The test kits arrived to the Division at noon on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. A voice message was sent to parents/families once the kits had arrived.

The tests can be picked up at the Division Office:

- January 3-January 7 between 8 am-12 pm OR 12:30 pm-3:30 pm
- January 10-January 14 between 8:30 am-12 pm OR 1 pm-4:30 pm

### Extended Winter Break until January 10 - Students

Winter break was extended for students to January 10 to allow for more time to assess the impact of the variant and for schools to have more time to plan next steps.

School administration and staff will be in attendance according to the school calendar. They will be working on operational plans for the upcoming weeks. This phased-in approach will give school divisions and schools more time to plan for staffing shortages and expected absenteeism due to isolation requirements. This will also allow schools time to prepare to move to the restricted (Orange) level on Manitoba's Pandemic Response System (PRS) once students return to class.

### COVID-19 K-12 Response Planning Team

The provincial COVID-19 K-12 Response Planning Team (RPT) held a planning meeting to discuss key items that are being discussed with public health officials, including

- Potential change in PRS level for schools (Orange and Red contingency plans)
- Rapid testing approaches including a discussion of prioritizing limited supply
- Preventative health measures, including changes to mask guidance in light of recent public health information
- Need to review guidance for contact management and isolation in light of the short incubation period for omicron, the new testing protocols and the extensive community transmission

The items discussed feed into active discussions with public health. Updates are provided by Manitoba Education as they are received.

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### Stakeholder Briefings

- School divisions received updated information from Manitoba Education and public health at 1.30 pm on Tuesday, January 4.
- A press conference on Covid-19 return to school update occurred on Tuesday, January 4 at 2 pm with Premier Heather Stefanson, Education Minister Cliff Cullen, and Dr. Jazz Atwal, deputy chief provincial public health officer, to discuss COVID-19 return to school update.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dY-eT4PcaQ>
- Superintendents will join a 12:30 pm meeting on Wednesday, January 5, 2022, for an update and further information on public health initiatives in response to COVID-19.
- A meeting will be hosted with principals, school leaders and public health on Thursday, January 6 at 12:30, to provide further updates.

### One-week remote learning period

As announced at the press conference on Tuesday, January 4, all schools will enter into a **one-week remote learning period**. School staff will be present in school but regular classroom sessions will not be in effect until Monday, January 17.

All students move to teacher-led remote learning delivered by online google classes and/or home packages, depending on age of students and accessibility of internet connection for families. **Please review updated emails from your school Principal for further information and details.**

### *Critical Service Workers*

Schools will endeavor to accommodate K–6 children of critical services workers who cannot make alternative care arrangements so that these students may attend school. While at school, these students will participate in and receive support for the same teacher-led remote learning that their classmates who are learning from home are receiving.

Critical service workers were previously identified by Manitoba Education in the documents:  
<http://wmems.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Manitoba-Critical-Services-Worker.pdf>  
<https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/pubs/2020-191critical-services-worker-definition.pdf>

Manitoba Education has indicated that Tier 1 critical services workers will be eligible to have children accommodated in school, if required. They will be prioritized by schools/divisions.

- Health/Health Services Workers
- Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Providers (all teachers, administrators, and support staff)
- Child Care Workers
- Law Enforcement
- Corrections Workers
- Fire and Paramedic First Responders
- Direct Social Services and Child Protection Workers

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Additional critical services workers may include people who provide critical services to Manitobans. These Tier 2 workers could be accommodated, if staffing is available. They include:

- Front-line natural resource workers
- Grocery store staff
- Hospital/clinic support staff

### *Submitting Request Form*

Parents will need to identify if they are a critical service worker in need of school access for their child. The document which was provided to families last year has been attached. This will help identify eligible students. Parents are asked to submit the **Critical Services Worker School Request Form** (*see attached*) to their school Principal as soon as possible.

### *Special Needs*

Students with special needs in K to 12, as defined on page 5 of Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services (2006) and those identified as being at risk as outlined previously, continue to have the option to attend school, as outlined in their student-specific IEP plans. As always, the best interests of students would be at the forefront. Supports and instruction will be guided by the student-specific planning process.

### *Busing Canceled*

The School Division will not be responsible for student transportation during a Critical (Red) PRS level as regular classes will not be in session. As all schools will be returning to remote learning, **busing will not be occurring** until in-person classes resume on Monday, January 17 OR until Manitoba Education provides new guidelines for school divisions.

### *Other Measures*

Manitoba Education will work to provide additional masks to schools. Medical-grade masks will also be required for staff when classes resume. Students will be asked to wear well-fitting masks with at least three layers.

Manitoba Education rapid tests distribution is to be expanded for school access and use.

Travel, team events, field trips or outings are cancelled until January 17 OR until further guidelines are received by Manitoba Education and/or public health.