



March 30th, 2021

Updated Guidelines for Schools K-12 (COVID-19)



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COVID-19 Public Health Update for K-12 Schools

UPDATED: March 30th, 2021

This document provides a list of updates to be implemented in K-12 schools to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 and maintain a safe and healthy school environment for students, families, and staff.

The infection prevention and exposure control measures in place have been shown to be effective at stopping or limiting transmission of COVID-19 within schools. However, there are areas where renewed attention and focus are needed.

These include:

- Preventing crowding at all times, particularly at the start and end of day.
- Avoiding close face-to-face contact whenever possible.
- Assigning staff to a specific cohort whenever possible.
- Staggering recess, lunch, and class transition times whenever possible.
- Ensuring that the use of masks does not reduce or replace practicing physical distancing and other prevention measures, for both students and staff.
- Ensuring prevention measures are in place in staff-only areas, including break and meeting rooms.
- Implementing music classes according to the [British Columbia Music Educators' Association and the Coalition for Music Education in British Columbia Guidance for Music Classes](#).
- Ensuring physical activity is delivered in line with the guidance in this document.

Additional Infection Prevention and Exposure Control Measures

The Hierarchy for Infection Prevention and Exposure Control Measures for Communicable Disease describes measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 in schools. Control measures at the top are more effective and protective than those at the bottom. By implementing a combination of measures at each level, the risk of COVID-19 is substantially reduced.

This document includes a list of infection prevention and exposure control measures to be implemented in schools according to the hierarchy of control measures, as follows:

- Environmental Measures
- Administrative Measures
- Personal Measures
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The control measures listed in this document are to be implemented in addition to the control measures that are already in place as outlined in each school's Site Specific COVID-19 Safety Plan. Administrators are to ensure that these control measures are in place by Feb 24th, 2021 and that the school JHSC is involved in the process. Administrators will confirm the implementation of the additional control measures by submitting the [school's Site Specific COVID-19 Safety Plan Update March 30th](#) to the District and will post the update with their current Site Specific COVID-19 Safety Plan. Any site specific COVID-19 safety items identified that are not addressed in this update will require a [Site Specific COVID-19 Risk Assessment](#) to be conducted and all completed assessments are to be included in the school's Site Specific COVID-19 Safety Plan.

Administrators are to review the updated Site Specific COVID-19 Safety Plan with all staff prior to April 30th, 2021.

District COVID-19 Safety Plan Update

Additional Physical Distancing Measures

- In staff only spaces, staff are required to wear masks when indoors, in addition to maintaining physical distance (2M)

Supporting Students with Disabilities/Diverse Abilities

Where Physical Contact may be Required:

- Staff are required to wear a non-medical mask, a face covering or a face shield (in which case a non-medical mask should be worn in addition to the face shield), when staff are working with a student indoors, and the service cannot be provided from behind a barrier.
- Students in Grades 4 to 12 are required to wear a non-medical mask or face covering when receiving services indoors and a barrier is not present.
- For students in Grades K to 3, the student or parent/caregiver should determine whether or not the student should also be wearing any PPE when receiving services in close physical proximity.

Additional Personal Protective Equipment Measures

- Participants at staff meetings, in-service and professional development activities, and other staff-only gatherings are required to wear masks if barriers between participants are not present.
- All K-12 staff are required to wear a mask or a face shield (in which case a mask should be worn in addition to the face shield) indoors in schools and on school buses - both within and outside of their learning group.
- All students in Grades 4 to 12 are required to wear a mask or a face shield (in which case a non-medical mask should be worn in addition to the face shield) indoors in schools and on school buses - both within and outside of their learning group.
- Students in Grades K to 3 are encouraged to wear a mask indoors in schools and on school buses but are not required to do so - mask wearing remains a personal or family/caregiver choice for these students, and their choices must be respected.
- No student should be prevented from attending or fully participating at school if they do not wear a mask.

Exceptions for Staff, Students and Visitors

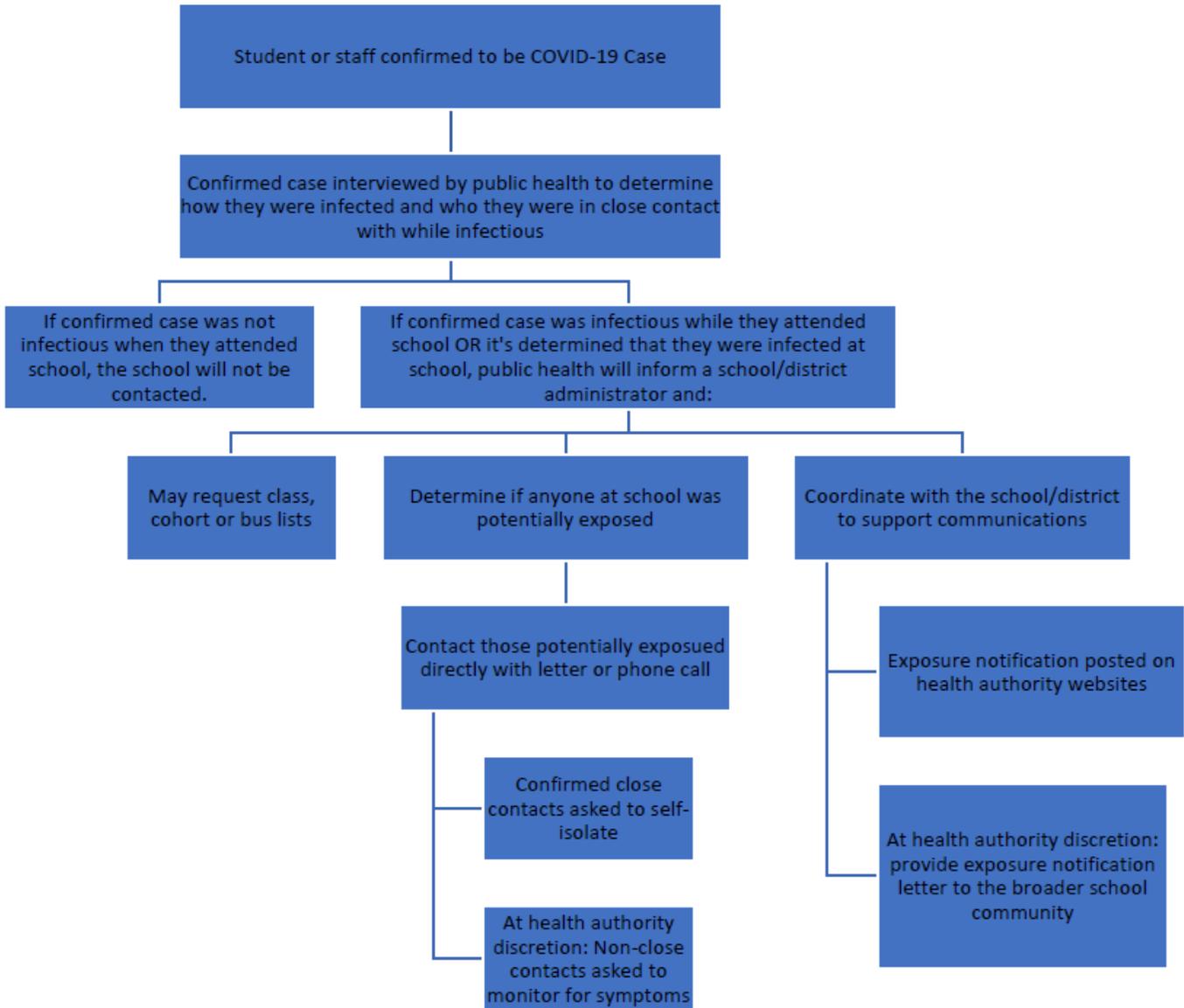
The guidance outlined above regarding mask requirements does not apply to staff, students and visitors in the following circumstances:

- To a person who cannot tolerate wearing a mask for health or behavioural reasons
- To a person who is unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person
- If the mask is removed temporarily for the purposes of identifying the person wearing it
- If the mask is removed temporarily to engage in an educational activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask (e.g. playing a wind instrument, engaging in high-intensity physical activity, etc.)
- If a person is eating or drinking
- If a person is behind a barrier
- While providing a service to a person with a disability or diverse ability (including but not limited to a hearing impairment) where visual cues, facial expressions and/or lip reading/movements is important.

Curriculum, Programs and Activities

- Masks can be temporarily removed while engaging in an educational activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask (e.g. playing a wind instrument) but must be worn while singing.
- K-12 staff are required to wear masks during PHE/outdoor program classes when they are indoors, and a barrier is not present
- For low intensity activities (e.g. yoga, walking), students are required to wear masks when they are indoors, and a barrier is not present.
- K-12 staff are required to wear masks during theatre, film, and dance programs when they are indoors, and a barrier is not present.
- Students in Grades 4 to 12 are required to wear masks during theatre, film, and dance programs when they are indoors, except during high-intensity physical activity.

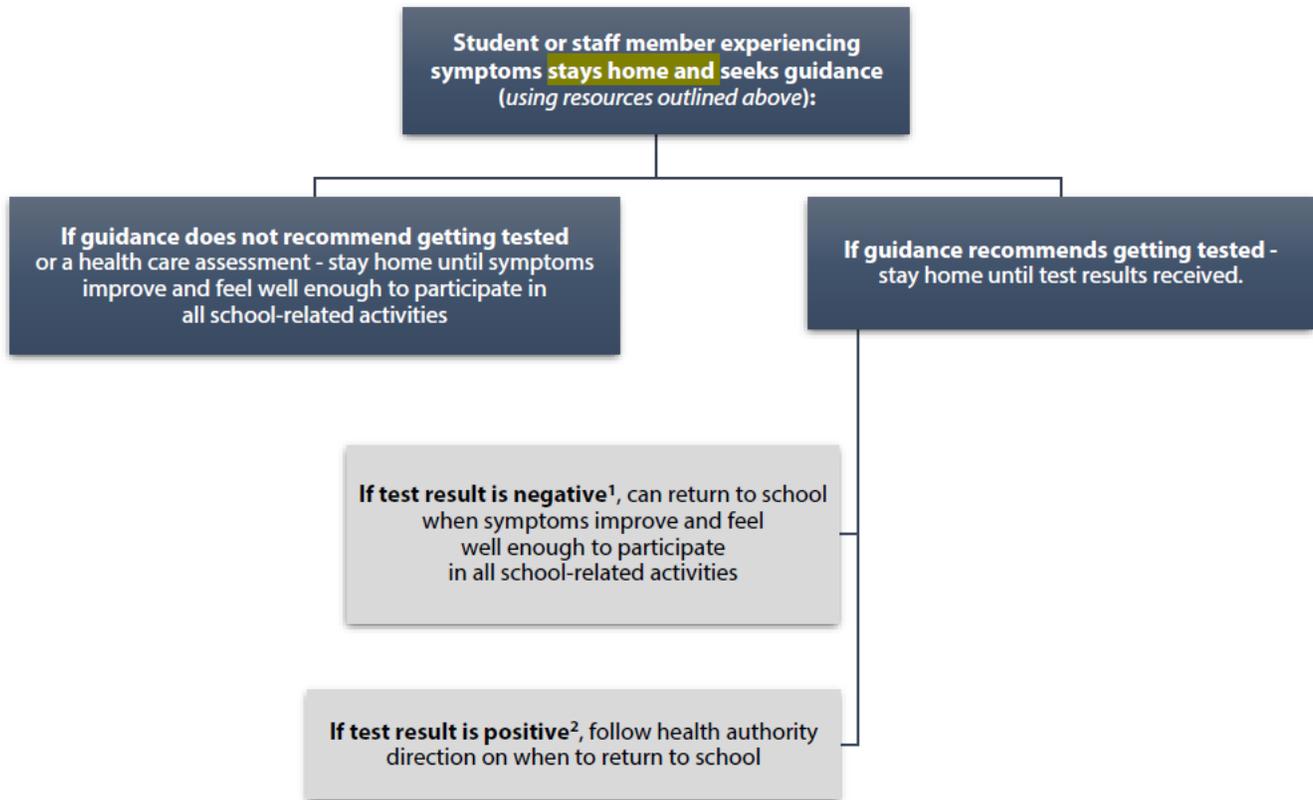
Appendix A: Contact Tracing and Public Health Notifications in Schools



Regional health authorities determine their own notification processes. The notifications used in some regions may differ from what is included here. In all regions, public health ensures anyone who may be a close contact (i.e., those required to self-isolate) is notified. Additional information on contact tracing, self-isolation and close contacts is available from BCCDC.

Appendix B: COVID-19 Symptoms, Testing & Return to School

When a student, staff or other adult can return to school depends on the type of symptoms they experienced and if a COVID-19 test is recommended. See the [K-12 Health Check app](#) and BCCDC [When to get tested for COVID-19](#) for specific guidance. Staff, students and parents/caregivers can also use the BCCDC online [Self-Assessment Tool](#), or call 8-1-1 or their health care provider.



1. Symptoms of common respiratory illnesses can persist for a week or more. Re-testing is not needed unless the person develops a new illness. [BCCDC](#) has information on receiving negative test results.
2. Public health will contact everyone with a positive test. Visit the BCCDC website for more information on [positive test results](#).

Appendix C: Supplementary Guidance for School Meal Programs

This guidance is adapted from the [WorkSafe BC Restaurants, cafes, pubs, and nightclubs: Protocols for returning to operation](#) to support the delivery of school meal programs, breakfast clubs and other food access initiatives that are not regulated under the *Food Premises Regulation*.

General Considerations

- Students from different cohorts can access school meal programs at the same time if necessary (e.g. a morning breakfast program offered only to students who may need it). Physical distance between students from different cohorts should be maintained as much as is practical to do so while ensuring the program can be offered.

Food Delivery and Preparation

- Limit the number of staff/volunteers in a food preparation or eating area at any one time to those necessary to ensure the program can be delivered.
- Inform delivery agents and other volunteers of how to adhere to the school's visitor policy, where food should be delivered to, and what hours food can be accepted at.
- Develop and establish hand hygiene procedures for all staff/volunteers. This includes before and after leaving the food preparation area and using equipment.
- Donated food, including Traditional foods, can continue to be accepted in line with regular food safety precautions for accepting food donations.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Continue with regular cleaning and disinfecting practices for food services.
- Identify high-touch surfaces to ensure they are cleaned and disinfected in line with the guidance in this document and existing food safety practices.
 - High-touch surfaces may include ingredients and containers, equipment such as switches, dials and handles and shared serving utensils if they are used by multiple people.

Food Distribution to Students

- Students should practice hand hygiene before accessing food.
- Schools can continue to provide self-service stations (e.g., salad bar, self-serve breakfast, etc.).
 - Consider pre-plating or serving food directly if students are unable to consistently implement personal measures (e.g. practice regular hand hygiene, not touch their face, etc.) or to prevent gathering or crowding.
- Post signs to remind students to practice hand hygiene and to maintain space from one another.
- If food is served to students, re-usable plates, utensils and containers can be used, with normal cleaning and disinfecting methods for dishwashing implemented.
- Provided food safety precautions are followed, leftover food can be sent home with students.

Appendix D: What to Do if a Student or Staff Member Develops Symptoms at School

<p><i>If a Student Develops Symptoms of Illness At School</i></p>	<p><i>If a Staff Member Develops Symptoms of Illness At School</i></p>
<p>Staff must take the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Immediately separate the symptomatic student from others in a supervised area. 2. Contact the student’s parent or caregiver to pick them up as soon as possible. 3. Where possible, maintain a 2-metre distance from the ill student. If not possible, staff should wear a mask if available and tolerated, or use a tissue to cover their nose and mouth. 4. Provide the student with a mask or tissues to cover their coughs or sneezes. Throw away used tissues as soon as possible and perform hand hygiene. 5. Avoid touching the student’s body fluids (e.g., mucous, saliva). If you do, practice diligent hand hygiene. 6. Once the student is picked up, practice diligent hand hygiene. 7. Staff responsible for facility cleaning must clean and disinfect the space where the student was separated and any areas recently used by them (e.g., classroom, bathroom, common areas). <p>Parents or caregivers must pick up their child as soon as possible if they are notified their child is ill.</p>	<p>Staff should go home as soon as possible.</p> <p>If unable to leave immediately:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Symptomatic staff should separate themselves into an area away from others. 2. Maintain a distance of 2 metres from others. 3. Use a tissue or mask to cover their nose and mouth while they wait to be picked up. 4. Staff responsible for facility cleaning must clean and disinfect the space where the staff member was separated and any areas used by them (e.g., classroom, bathroom, common areas).

Students and staff should return to school according to the guidance under the Returning to School After Sickness sections of the [BCCDC/Ministry Guidance for K-12 Schools](#). A health-care provider note should not be required for students or staff to return.

Appendix E: Updated Provincial COVID-19 Health & Safety Guidelines – Q&A

Q1: How should the mask requirements in schools be enforced? If someone refuses to wear a mask, should they be sent home?

- All staff, students and visitors are required to follow the mask guidelines for schools, except for those who meet one of the two exceptions below:
 - a person who cannot tolerate wearing a mask for health or behavioural reasons; or
 - a person who is unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person
- Those who can wear masks can also remove them temporarily in the following circumstances:
 - for the purposes of identification;
 - to engage in an educational activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask (e.g. playing a wind instrument, engaging in high-intensity physical activity, etc.);
 - while eating or drinking;
 - if a person is behind a barrier; or
 - while providing a service to a person with a disability or diverse ability where visual cues, facial expressions and/or lip reading/movements is important.
- In circumstances where someone cannot comply with a specific safety measure due to health or behavioral reasons, schools are expected to work with these individuals (and their parents/caregivers, if applicable) to explore other measures to ensure their safety and the safety of others in alignment with the parameters outlined above.
- Staff, students and visitors are not required to provide a doctor's note if they cannot wear a mask.
- Schools and school districts are expected to support students and staff to follow the provincial guidelines in ways that are not punitive or stigmatizing. This can include:
 - Having staff model these behaviours.
 - Sharing reliable information, including from the BC Centre for Disease Control and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, to parents, families and caregivers.
 - Promoting the required safety measures in the school with visual aids like floor markings and signage.
- Students must not be prevented from attending or fully participating at school, in person, if they do not wear a mask.
- The strengthened mask guidelines are one of many K-12 health and safety protocols in place to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in schools. These include physical distancing between learning groups, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting procedures, and frequent hand hygiene. Those students and staff who cannot wear a mask must still follow all other health and safety measures in place while at school.
- All students and staff must continue to be asked to complete daily health checks and to stay at home if they feel unwell. This includes students and staff who cannot wear a mask.

Q2: Why does the updated BCCDC guidance on mask requirements say "should" and the K-12 Health & Safety Guidelines say "required"? Which one are schools supposed to follow?

- Since the beginning of the pandemic, the approach of the PHO and the Ministry has been to provide direction to the K-12 system through policy and guidance, not through legislative order. This allows for a more flexible and nimble approach and supports the direction to be implemented in a positive (not punitive) manner.

- Recent changes to the mask guidelines are consistent with the approach taken since September. The BCCDC guidance on masks has always used the language “should”, whereas the Ministry’s K-12 Health & Safety Guidelines have strengthened the language to make it an operational requirement for schools. This decision was made in collaboration with K-12 partners and has been applied consistently throughout the updates of the health and safety guidelines.
- It is also important to note that both the BCCDC and Ministry guidelines on masks have exceptions for students and staff who cannot wear masks for health or behavioural reasons.
- The K-12 Health & Safety Guidelines have been developed to complement the BCCDC guidance, and the two guidance documents are largely aligned. However, in the case of any variance between the two guidance documents, schools and school districts must follow the Ministry’s K-12 Health & Safety Guidelines. For more information, see the Key Principles section of the [guidelines](#) on page 5.

Q3: Are staff or students able to remove their mask when they are alone in a room (e.g. office, bathroom)? Are custodians able to remove their mask when they are alone in a hallway or commonspace after hours (e.g. evening custodian)?

- Yes, in these circumstances the person can remove their mask. The walls of the room/space qualify as a barrier when the person is alone.
- However, if another person enters the room or space, both parties must wear masks.

Q4: What about split classes (e.g. 3/4)?

- Students in Grades 4 and above must wear masks in classrooms, regardless of whether it is a split class or not.
- Schools can encourage students (and their families) in Grades K to 3 to wear masks in classrooms shared with students in Grades 4 and above, in an effort to create more consistent safety measures in that class.
- However, mask use ultimately remains a personal choice for students in Grades K to 3. In addition, exceptions to mask use for health and behavioural reasons apply to all K-12 students (see Q2 above for more information regarding mask exceptions).

Q5: How do the changes impact music programs and activities?

- Music programs can continue to be delivered in K-12 schools, in alignment with the guidance on p.38 of the [K-12 Health & Safety Guidelines](#).
- The key changes for music programs is that masks must be worn at all times by K-12 staff and students in Grades 4 to 12 when indoors, but can be temporarily removed to engage in educational activities that cannot be performed while wearing a mask (e.g. playing a wind instrument). Masks must be worn by K-12 staff and students in Grades 4 to 12 while singing.
- These mask requirements for K-12 staff and students in Grades 4 to 12 apply both within and outside of learning groups, and regardless of whether staff and students are able to maintain physical distance (2M).
- Masks requirements are in addition to, and not a replacement for, physical distancing requirements (2M) between learning groups.

Q6: How do the changes impact PHE and school sports? Do all high intensity activities need to take place outside now?

- The key changes for PHE and school sports are:
 - K-12 staff and other adults (e.g. volunteer coaches) are required to wear masks when they are indoors, and a barrier is not present. The updated mask requirements no longer allow staff/adults to remove their mask while maintaining physical distance of 2M.

- Programs and activities for students in grades 4 to 12 (*formerly middle and secondary students*) must follow specific guidance for high intensity and low intensity activities. Students in these grades must wear masks during low intensity activities when indoors and a barrier is not present - both within and outside of their learning group, and regardless of whether or not they are able to maintain physical distance (2M).
- High-intensity physical and sport activities should be taken outside whenever possible, but are allowed to continue indoors in alignment with the guidance for PHE and school sports on p.38-42 of the [K-12 Health & Safety Guidelines](#). Wearing masks during high intensity activities (stationary or with movement, indoors or outdoors) remains a personal choice for students.

Q7: Do the new mask requirements in schools end on April 19th?

- The updated BCCDC mask guidance is time limited, with an intention for it to be reviewed after April 19th. This is in line with other [time-limited extensive measures](#) recently announced by the Provincial Health Officer.
- The updated K-12 Health & Safety Guidelines do not have an expiry date.
- The Ministry will work with the Office of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO), BCCDC and the K-12 Education Steering Committee up to and after the end of the “circuit breaker” on April 19th to assess and evaluate impacts of these changes, and consider if further updates to the K-12 Health & Safety Guidelines are required.

Additional Resources

- [BCCDC/Ministry COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K-12 Schools](#)
- [BC Provincial COVID-19 Health & Safety Guidelines for K-12 Setting](#)
- [BCMEA/CMEBC Guidance for Music Classes in BC During COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Protocols for School and District Administrators - Management of Illness and Confirmed Cases](#)
- [COVID-19 Health and Safety Inspection Checklist](#)