



Communicable Disease Prevention Policy

Saplings Nature School

August 2022

NOTE: This document will be updated as needed to reflect any new information from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and WorkSafeBC. We will continue to cooperate with the guidance from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and update our policies in line with ongoing changes and recommendations as they are presented to us.

Rationale

In the fall of 2021, the government of British Columbia directed all schools in the province to transition to a Communicable Disease Prevention Plan. Communicable disease prevention focuses on reducing the risk of workplace transmission of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases, and includes both ongoing measures (e.g. hand hygiene) and additional measures to be implemented as advised by public health. This document was created/updated based on:

- [The Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings.](#)
- [The BCCDC COVID-19 Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools.](#)
- [The K-12 Education Recovery Plan regarding education programs and supports and](#)
- [The COVID-19 Protocols for School & District Administrators and Staff regarding the management of illness and exposures in school. \[1\]](#)

Policy

Medical Health Officers continue to be able to place local Public Health Orders requiring additional health and safety measures beyond the Provincial COVID-19 Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 Settings. Local Public Health Orders may be placed for entire regions or communities, including schools, or for specific settings/activities within a health authority region. The Medical Health Officer may issue a recommendation for an individual school, groups of schools, district etc.

Employees, parents and school visitors are to review this document and follow these operational guidelines when in Saplings Nature School in order to ensure the health & safety of self and others; everyone must do their part to help reduce the spread of the virus.

Vaccines

Vaccines are the most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in schools and communities. The vaccines used in B.C. remain highly effective against COVID-19, including among variants of concern. Vaccinated people aged 12 and older tend to have milder illness if they get infected and are also less likely to spread COVID-19 than unvaccinated people 12 and older. Proof of Vaccination is NOT required for school staff, volunteers, students or visitors.

Procedures

Drop-off and pick-up

Drop-off and pick-up will be done outside. Parents are asked to be aware of current physical distancing advice from our Provincial Authorities and to maintain distance from other families unless they are already in close contact if deemed necessary. Each caregiver will verbally sign in their child with the teacher and confirm that their child is in good health and symptom-free. Please make sure you have the educators' phone number to call if you plan to come earlier or later for drop off and/or pick up.

8:45-9:00 am Drop off and Free Inquiry Time

Parents who arrive during the 15 minute drop off window can leave their child(ren) with one of the teachers at the entry to the forest. Students will then meet the other teacher in the forest for free inquiry time. This is a really special time for the children to lead games and forge friendships on their own terms. It may be possible to have quick check-ins with teachers at this time.

Arriving Late

Those who arrive after 9:00 must accompany their child to the forest with their child ready to quietly join morning circle with a minimum amount of disruption. We will begin circle time promptly at 9:05. This early morning routine sets the course and tone of the day, and is an essential part of our learning experience. It helps build community by bringing students together to share stories, it lets students know what to expect from the day, and it opens the channels of inquiry we are following. It will not be possible for parents to speak to teachers for any longer than a moment once the circle has begun.

Early Pick Up

Parents who wish/need to pick up early will need to alert the teaching staff, and enter the building through the lower door then alert teachers by walking up the stairs to the classroom doorway and catching their attention with a wave. Teachers will alert the student, and parents can then accompany their child(ren) to gather their personal items before going home.

2:45-3:00 pm Pick Up

Students who stay for the full day will participate in our end of the day circle and grounding exercises as well as classroom jobs. These again bring students together after our busy days of inquiry, to reflect and open up to one another as a whole group, solidifying trust and understanding. Parents will meet their child(ren) outside the front of the school as usual.

Parental Responsibilities

Parents are responsible for monitoring their child's health, ensuring they do not attend the program if they have a cough, fever, or runny nose. There will be no exceptions to this health and safety policy. If students become ill during the day, parents will be contacted, and must be available to pick up their child as soon as possible. Parents are reminded to be aware of personal space when dropping off and picking up their children.

Educator Responsibilities

Educators are not responsible for the screening of the student's health as they are not healthcare professionals. However, at drop off parents will be asked to give the educator verbal confirmation that their child is in good-health and symptom free. Educators are responsible for monitoring their own health. If an educator is ill, they must stay home and are advised to consult with a healthcare professional before returning to work. Educators will ensure students are frequently washing their hands and offer positive reminders to follow other personal hygiene practices like sneezing into their arm, avoiding touching their faces etc.

Handwashing

All parents are asked to pack hand-sanitizer or warm soapy water in a thermos for their child and to ensure their child washes their hands before drop-off. Students will wash or sanitize their hands before meals, after toilet use, and throughout the day. Staff also have hand sanitizer and/or warm soapy water on hand to use at any time.

Staff and visitors are required to wash and/or sanitize their hands upon entering Saplings, before and after eating and after using the washroom. Opportunities for frequent hand hygiene will be provided by teachers, including: when students arrive at school, before and after eating and drinking (excluding personal water bottles and drinks), before and after using an indoor learning space used by multiple classes and shared equipment, after using the washroom, after sneezing or coughing into hands, and whenever hands are visibly dirty.

- Teachers will remind students about the steps they can take to keep themselves and others healthy and staff will model these behaviours throughout the day.
- Teachers will remind students to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Teachers will assist younger students with hand hygiene as needed.

Equipment

At Saplings, we believe less is more. Most of our programs do not use man-made materials. Students are encouraged to play with materials found in the natural landscape. However, if or when we explore materials such as clay, the students will wash their hands prior to using it and it will not be shared amongst peers. Carpets/rugs/and frequently touched items such as blocks, may be used if hand hygiene is practiced before and after use. Students and staff should not share items that come in contact with the mouth (e.g. food, drinks, unwashed utensils, wind instruments). Students are encouraged to use personal hooks, cubbies, and storage spaces. Visibly dirty surfaces will be cleaned as well as disinfected. Garbage containers will be emptied frequently. All frequently-touched surfaces including tables, chairs, railings and door handles will be sanitized regularly. Any other materials introduced will be sanitized after use.

Physical distancing and Prevention Strategies in use when advised by Provincial Authorities

As per provincial government recommendations, children will not be required to maintain a 2-metre distance at all times. However, adolescent children will be encouraged, using positive language, to follow physical distancing practices during our programs.

For younger children, maintaining physical distance is less practical. The Provincial Health Office guidelines focus on minimizing physical contact instead. This recommendation will be met by maintaining small group sizes and ratios in both indoor and outdoor environments.

Please be aware, educators will inevitably have close contact with children throughout the day when comforting children and caring for their various needs. However, educators will follow strict personal hygiene protocols to ensure the safety of all children.

The following strategies may be implemented wherever and whenever possible and/or necessary:

- Teachers and staff will remind students to avoid close greetings (e.g., hugs, high-fives, handshakes, etc.). In general, students will be asked to minimize physical contact with others.
- Teachers and staff will remind students about keeping their “hands to yourself”.
- Staff will encourage timely return from washroom use for all students while emphasizing the importance of proper handwashing.
- Teachers will organize group activities that are adapted to minimize physical contact.
- The front office will manage the traffic flow to limit the number of people in common areas, including hallways.

- Remind students and staff about respecting others' personal space. Use visual supports, signage, prompts, video modelling, etc. as necessary.
- Use available space to spread people out, both in learning environments and for gatherings and events, where possible.
- Implement strategies that prevent crowding at pick-up and drop-off times. Focus on entry and exit areas, and other places where people may gather or crowd.
- Stagger recess/snack, lunch and transition times to provide a greater amount of space for everyone.

Staff Illness

Saplings reserves the right to cancellations of programs due to staff illness (if we cannot find coverage) or any other circumstances. In this unlikely event, parents will be alerted as soon as possible via Slack and/or email.

Masks and Barrier Masks

When advised by the Provincial Health Officer, staff and students in Grades K to 8 will be required to wear a non-medical mask or face covering

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 are important.; or
- in particular circumstances while providing a service to a person with a disability or diverse ability (see below)

Schools must not require a health-care provider note (i.e. a doctor's note) to confirm if staff, students or visitors cannot wear a mask. No student should be prevented from attending or fully participating.

Saplings will provide disposable non-medical masks to staff or students who forget their masks at home. We will store the masks properly to avoid cross-contamination.

Supporting Students with Diversity

Supporting student with disabilities/diverse abilities may require staff providing support services to be in close physical proximity or in physical contact with a student

- When indoors, and the services cannot be provided from behind a barrier, staff are required to wear a non-medical mask, face covering or face shield (in which case a non-medical mask should be worn in addition to the face shield).
- When working with students when seeing facial expressions and/or lip movement is important, and the service cannot be provided from behind a barrier, options include having the staff member wear a mask with a transparent section to enable visualization of the mouth.

Screening Measures

Provincial Health Office guidelines indicate that Saplings does not have any role in screening students or staff for symptoms, checking temperatures or COVID-19 testing. Such activities are reserved for health care professionals.

- Parents and caregivers should assess their children daily for illness before sending them to school. Please use the K-12 Health Check app (<https://www.k12dailycheck.gov.bc.ca/>). If sick, children must remain home.
- Staff and other adults should complete a daily health check prior to entering the school. If sick, they must remain home and not enter the building.
- Doctor's notes are NOT required to confirm health status
- The school may ask parents of some students who are not able to self-assess to confirm the child does not have any symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19 or other infectious respiratory disease
- A staff member will ensure school staff and other adults entering the school know of their responsibility to assess themselves daily for symptoms of common cold, influenza, COVID-19 or other infectious respiratory disease prior to entering the school.
- You can contact a family physician or nurse practitioner to be assessed for COVID-19 and other common respiratory illnesses.*

** 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.*

Visitors

Parents, caregivers, health-care providers, volunteers and other non-staff people (e.g, visitors) entering the school should be limited to those supporting activities that are of benefit to student learning and well being. Visitors are encouraged to schedule an appointment with a staff member.

- All visitors must provide active confirmation (sign in at entry) that they have no symptoms of illness and are not required to self-isolate.
- When advised by the Provincial Health Officer, all visitors to the school are required to wear a mask
- Visitors are encouraged to make appointments to come into the school
- Visitors are to complete a daily health check prior to entering the school. If sick, they must not enter the building
- Visitors are to be aware of the communicable disease protocols and requirements
- Visitor access is limited to those areas required for the purpose of the visit
- Parents/caregivers/visitors are to respect others' personal space while on school grounds or in learning areas

Staying home, self-isolation AND returning to school

- staff will assess themselves, and parents will assess their children daily for symptoms of the common cold, influenza, COVID-19, or other common illnesses prior to entering the school building. Refer to the provincial [K-12 Health Check](#) app for daily assessment of symptoms
- staff and students must stay home when sick or if required to self-isolate. Refer to the BCCDC online [Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- staff or parents will notify school administration immediately if they suspect themselves with possible symptoms of the common cold, influenza, or COVID-19
- staff or students will be sent home immediately if they become sick and must self-isolate

- Any student, staff, or other person within the school who has cold, influenza, or COVID-19-like symptoms should seek assessment by a health-care provider and self-isolate while they await the results. Refer to the BCCDC "[When To Get Tested For COVID-19](#)"
- staff and students who have travelled outside of Canada must check with and follow all Federal and Provincial guidelines about re-entry into the country before returning to school
- staff and students may still attend school if a member of their household has cold, influenza, or COVID19- like symptoms, provided the student/staff is asymptomatic. It is expected the symptomatic household member is seeking assessment by a health-care provider
- staff and students who experience seasonal allergies or other COVID-19-like symptoms, which are related to an existing condition, can continue to attend school when they are experiencing these symptoms as normal. If they experience any change in symptoms, they should seek assessment by a health-care provider
- Staff and students can return to school after illness once deemed healthy by health professionals; a doctor's note is NOT required
- After Covid-19 or other communicable disease return following the advice of a health practitioner
- For other illnesses, when the symptoms have improved, and they feel well enough to participate in all school activities
- If you are unsure, call 811

Ventilation and Air Circulation

At this time, there is no evidence that a building's ventilation system, in good operating condition, would contribute to the spread of the virus. Good indoor air ventilation alone cannot protect people from exposure to COVID-19; however, it may reduce risk when used in addition to other preventative measures. Good ventilation will be achieved in our classrooms through the use of recommended air filters, air purifiers and regular use of open windows. Filters will be changed regularly and according to manufacturer's recommendations.

Other measures may include but are not limited to:

- regularly maintaining HVAC systems
- opening windows or doors, weather permitting
- fans must not direct air into faces/breathing zones of staff or students
- moving activities outdoors when possible

Food practices

- Food safety should continue to follow normal food safety measures and requirements

- Implement the required cleaning and disinfecting measures
- Practice diligent hand hygiene by washing hands with plain soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after eating
- Where food is prepared by students, it may be consumed only by those who prepared it
- Equipment that touches the mouth should not be shared unless disinfected between use
- Food sales, hot lunch programs and fundraisers are permitted
- Food and beverages should not be shared
- Homemade food items to be made available to other students are not permitted. Store-treats are permitted if they are pre-packaged and allergy aware (e.g. birthday treats). Gift bags are allowed at this time.

Music

- If provincially mandated, masks may be temporarily removed while playing a wind instrument, but would be worn while singing
- Shared equipment must be disinfected between different individual use and proper hand hygiene should be practiced

School Library/Learning Commons

- There is no need to clean, disinfect or quarantine laminated or glossy paper-based products

Theatre, Film and Dance Programs

Shared equipment such as set pieces, props, cameras etc. should be cleaned and disinfected between use; proper hand hygiene should be practiced before and after use of high frequency touched equipment.

PE programs/active body breaks

- Spread students and staff out in available space, outdoor activities are encouraged
- If masks are provincially mandated, students are NOT required to wear masks during high-intensity physical activities (e.g. stationary bike, weightlifting, basketball, soccer) but may choose to do so
- Staff are encouraged to move high-intensity physical activities outdoors whenever possible.
- If masks are provincially mandated, for low intensity activities (e.g. yoga, walking), students in Grades K-8 are required to wear masks when they are indoors and a barrier is not present.
- Shared equipment can be used, provided it is cleaned and disinfected as per guidelines Students are encouraged to wash their hands before and after using frequently touched items

Learning Outside

The guidelines issued by the Provincial Health Office encourage outdoor play and learning as much as possible.

Forested areas, river and pond banks, fields, and playgrounds are safe environments. Sand and water can be used for play if students wash their hands before and after play. COVID-19 does not survive well on surfaces, other than hard surfaces. There is no evidence showing that the virus survives on sand or in water.

- Students should come to school in clothing that is appropriate for outdoor activities and the weather conditions
- Students should have indoor shoes and an extra set of clothing on hand or in the school should a child need to change
- Practice proper hand hygiene before and after outdoor play
- Minimize unintentional physical contact between students
- Sand and water can be used (for play) provided students wash their hands before and after play

Students should be taught to independently change into and out of jackets and outdoor footwear and clothing in the designated area of the basement.

Supportive School Environments

Staff will utilize positive and inclusive approaches to engage students in preventive practices and will not employ measures that are punitive or stigmatizing in nature.

Staff will also utilize a trauma-informed lens when planning school activities (e.g. gatherings and events) and interacting with other staff and students, including considerations around respecting others personal space. We will continue to support students to practice personal preventative measures like hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and mask use by:

- Having staff model these behaviours
- Sharing reliable information with parents, families, and caregivers
- Promoting them at Saplings, by the use of visual aids such as signage

Cleaning and Disinfection

Regular cleaning and disinfection are essential to preventing the transmission of COVID-19 from contaminated objects and surfaces. There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted via textbooks, paper or other paper-based products. Saplings will be cleaned and disinfected in accordance with the BC Centre for Disease Control's Cleaning and Disinfectants for Public Settings document. This includes:

- general cleaning and disinfecting of the premises once in a 24 hour period.
- cleaning and disinfecting of materials in each classroom.
- cleaning and disinfecting frequently-touched surfaces daily (e.g. door knobs, light switches, tables, desks, chairs, electronic devices, keyboards and toys, etc.)
- clean washrooms daily keeping in line with the high touch surface area protocols.
- emptying garbage containers regularly.
- having disinfection sprays/wipes in the washrooms, basement area and upstairs classroom.
- Disinfection spray is made with [Germalin](#) recommended by the janitorial company and says on their website: "Germalin kills Canine parvovirus and is likely to kill the SARS-COV-2 virus" (the virus that causes COVID-19).
- Teachers and staff will ensure proper hand hygiene is followed before/after using items that are not easily cleaned (fabric items, sand, playdough, shared items and plush toys)
- Teachers and staff will wear disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids (e.g., runny nose, vomit, stool, urine). Wash hands before wearing and after removing gloves.
- School-wide events may be held in accordance with regional guidelines.
- Teachers will remind students about washing their hands frequently, about coughing and sneezing etiquette.
- Teachers will remind students not to share food, drinks, utensils or belongings.
- Staff and other adults should seek to use all available space and respect the personal space of others.

Extracurricular Activities

Intra- and inter-school extracurricular activities and special interest clubs can occur in alignment with the guidelines in this document and requirements of relevant local, regional and provincial health recommendations and Orders for community gatherings and events.

After school programs and after school care will be operational unless otherwise advised by Provincial Health Officers.

Field trips will resume using third party bus rentals and will follow all bus safety practices recommended by Provincial Health Officers.

Health and Wellbeing of Students and Staff

The staff at Saplings will continue to be sensitive to all parents, students and other staff members due to the complexities of their lives in addition to the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking care of your physical health is also good for your mental health. It's more important than ever to keep yourself healthy. Saplings will utilize a healing-centered approach when planning activities and events and when interacting with other staff and students, including considerations around respecting others' personal space.

Understanding coping strategies

- Students and teachers will model and practice daily grounding exercises which may include taking deep breaths, stretching, and/or mindfulness
- Weekly wellness groups are focussed on a variety of health and development activities such as pre-frontal cortex support and development, social stories, and learning how to manage anxiety or conflict
- Healthy eating choices, daily extended learning and playing opportunities outdoors, and regular sharing and discussion of the zones of regulation techniques help children become aware and then to express their needs
- Check-in and check-out circles are used daily to allow students to express anything on their minds, or to share their interests and personal stories with the group

Addressing individual student needs

- Making time to unwind and have free-play time to do activities students choose help create a community where students feel empowered and connected
- Connecting with friends, family, students, teachers, and other trusted people is a valuable source of support and community which encourages openness about personal concerns and general wellness
- Taking time to talk, answer questions and share facts with students about the events in their lives, the community, or the world in a way that your child can understand
- Reassuring students that they are safe and that it is ok if they feel upset. Sharing with them how others' manage their emotions or stress can help support their own use of coping strategies
- Ensuring that students understand the events or information at their level. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Maintaining regular routines whenever possible, and sharing the 'shape of the day' can create a sense of security and understanding of the day's activities.