

# Toronto Public Health Pandemic Plan A Planning Guide for Schools

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*Disclaimer: This Planning Guide is a tool to support planning for pandemic in the school sector. Toronto Public Health is not responsible for any misinterpretation or misuse of this guide.*

## 1.0 Introduction

Toronto Public Health has prepared a number of planning guides to assist community partners in developing their own pandemic plans.

The guides are intended to be used as planning tools. All agencies, organizations and other partners should use these tools alongside the specific advice provided by federal, provincial and local authorities during an actual pandemic situation.

### 1.1 Purpose of this guide

This general planning guide identifies issues and critical elements of emergency preparedness that organizations should consider in planning for a pandemic. Although Toronto Public Health will identify broad public health issues, every school must plan for the specific disruptions it will face during a pandemic.

The overall goal of pandemic planning is to reduce illness (morbidity), death (mortality), and social disruption resulting from a pandemic. Although this guide identifies specific issues associated with a pandemic, much of the information applies to other emergencies as well.

The schools planning guide is an evolving document and as planning continues at the federal, provincial and local levels, updated information will be added.

## 2.0 Schools – Specific Issues

### 2.1 Communications plan

Each school should prepare a communications plan that specifies how the school will communicate with staff, parents, volunteers, public health authorities, and the Ministry of Education during a pandemic. Important topics that may need to be communicated include information on infection control, possible school closures, and alternate methods for continuing education. Schools keep parents, caregivers and other community partners informed by maintaining up-to-date information on the schoolboard and school websites.

Toronto Public Health may use schools to distribute fact sheets on the pandemic virus to parents and staff during a pandemic. Toronto Public Health's two primary communication vehicles will be:

- The Toronto Public Health website (<https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/diseases-medications-vaccines/coronavirus/>), where information will be posted as soon as it becomes available, and
- Toronto Public Health Hotline: at 416-338-7600

### 2.2 Emergency contact lists

Each school should prepare and keep up-to-date a hard copy list of contact information for staff, parents, volunteers, Toronto Public Health, and Ministry officials. Schools should expand their current lists of contact information for individuals pre-approved for student pick-up, in case the designated persons are unavailable during a pandemic.

### 2.3 Continuing education

School boards and the Ministry of Education should plan for alternate education strategies for the ill or recovering child and for all children in the case of school closures. Some strategies may include home teaching tools or the internet; and provisioning of homework for students to keep them from falling behind

in studies. Consider flexible approaches to address missed work due to isolation or illness. To support families, ensure sick leave policies are in place and school attendance is flexible.

## 2.4 Protection of students whose families cannot care for them

Schools should develop plans for situations in which no parent, guardian or next of kin is available to care for a student, either temporarily or permanently, because the parent, guardian or next of kin is ill, in hospital, or has died. Current protocols for notifying children's aid societies should be followed.

## 2.5 Ill students

Schools should inform parents or guardians that students with symptoms of acute respiratory illness should stay home until they are symptom-free. Specific guidance on how long to remain at home will be communicated at the time of a pandemic.

Parents/guardians should advise the school of the reason for their child's absence.

If a student shows symptoms of the virus while at school, parents/guardians should be notified immediately to pick up their child. It is strongly recommended that schools promptly separate the ill student from others in a supervised area, office or a separate room until they can go home. In addition, anyone who is required to provide care to the student should maintain a distance of two meters (six feet) between them and the ill student, where possible.

It may be important for school programs to contact local public health to ensure the appropriate mode of transportation is used and any other necessary precautions are followed during transit (e.g. ambulance or private vehicle; avoid public transit including a school bus).

Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette should be practiced while the ill student is waiting to be picked up/excused/transported. Tissues should be provided for the student to ensure their proper use with respiratory etiquette. Proper disposal of the tissue and hand hygiene should be performed after coughing or sneezing. Environmental cleaning of the space the student was separated to should be conducted once they have been picked up.

## 2.6 Hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is an important element of infection control in all schools. During a pandemic, hand hygiene should be reinforced and practised by staff, children, parents, and visitors.

[Hand hygiene posters](#) should be posted at the entrance and in areas where they are likely to be seen to remind staff and students to practice hand hygiene frequently.

Washing hands with plain soap and water is recommended in schools as the mechanical action is effective at removing visible soil as well as microbes. In instances where hand washing sinks are not available, supervised [use of alcohol based hand sanitizers](#) (ABHS) should be considered. If hands are visibly soiled, alcohol-based hand sanitizers may not be effective at eliminating respiratory viruses. It is recommended that in addition to existing sinks, an increased number of hand sanitizing stations (e.g. wall mounted hand sanitizer dispensers) as well as tissues and waste receptacles be provided. Schools should ensure:

- Additional tissue supplies and waste receptacles are made available
- If hand sanitizer is provided to supplement hand washing facilities, secured dispensers should be placed in supervised areas
- Administration and staff are reminded that Safety Data Sheets and product labels provide additional information regarding placement, storage and warnings associated with ABHS

Hands should be cleaned frequently. At a minimum, practise hand hygiene:

- before eating lunch or snacks
- before and after food preparation
- after using the toilet
- after sneezing or coughing
- after wiping a child's nose (or a child wiping his/her own nose)
- before and after using shared computers, sports equipment, toys, musical instruments etc.
- upon entering or leaving the school

### 2.7 Respiratory etiquette

To prevent the spread of respiratory infections, proper respiratory etiquette should be taught to children and regularly practiced by staff and visitors. [Respiratory etiquette posters](#) at the entrance and in areas where they are likely to be seen should be posted to remind staff and students to practice proper respiratory etiquette.

Respiratory etiquette includes:

- Covering your nose and mouth during coughing and sneezing with a tissue or by turning your head away from others and sneezing or coughing into your sleeve or elbow
- Disposing of used tissues into the garbage immediately after use
- Practicing proper hand hygiene immediately after coughing or sneezing

### 2.8 Reinforce "no sharing policies"

To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses during a pandemic, water bottles used by sports teams should not be shared among the team players. Mouthpieces on musical instruments, especially those used by more than one student should be cleaned and disinfected as per standard practices recommended for the instrument. When feasible, students should have their own mouth pieces.

Hand hygiene should be practiced following the use of wind instruments.

### 2.9 Cleaning and Disinfecting

Regular cleaning and disinfecting of objects and high-touch surfaces will help to prevent the transmission of viruses from contaminated objects and surfaces. Increased monitoring of hand cleaning supplies is also recommended to ensure all sinks in washrooms, kitchens and classrooms are well stocked with hand washing supplies at all times (i.e., soap and paper towels).

As per standard procedures, it is recommended that school programs have toys that are easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g., avoid plush toys). It may be prudent to increase the frequency of the cleaning schedule for these items, especially when illness is circulating in the setting or the local community, or if symptomatic students have been playing with the toys.

School administrators are encouraged to review existing activities and practices within their settings to help determine where enhancements or increased cleaning frequencies may be recommended.

#### High-Touch Surfaces

It is recommended that high-touch objects and surfaces (e.g. pencil sharpeners, water fountain knobs and push buttons, doorknobs, faucet handles, toys, electronic devices and school bus hand rails) in schools are cleaned and disinfected regularly according to the school's standard procedures for routine cleaning, disinfecting, and waste handling.

There is no evidence to suggest that the mouthpieces of water fountains are a major source of virus transmission; however, they should be cleaned regularly according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Water fountain knobs and push buttons are considered to be a significant source of virus transmission and should be cleaned and disinfected in line with high-touch surfaces cleaning protocols. Consideration can be given to having students fill water bottles rather than having them drink directly from the mouthpiece of the fountain.

### **Cleaning Products**

Cleaning with water and household detergents and use of common disinfectant products should be sufficient for cleaning and disinfection in schools. If household or commercial disinfectant cleaning products are not readily available, hard surfaces can be disinfected using a mixture of 1-part bleach (5% sodium hypochlorite) and 9 parts water, ensuring the dilute solution makes contact with the surface for one minute for disinfection.

## **2.10 Student gatherings**

Schools may decide to temporarily cancel group activities and large events such as assemblies and sporting events. Whenever possible, student activities should be limited to classrooms. Consideration should also be given to cancelling or postponing after-school activities such as field trips, rallies or sporting events.

## **2.11 Food services**

During a pandemic, schools should reinforce routine food safety and sanitation practices. Schools should also consider the following:

- Reinforce regular hand washing by staff members who prepare food
- Use disposable cutlery and pre-packaged food, if staffing levels are low
- Consider stockpiling a six to eight-week supply of non-perishable food, in case deliveries of food are disrupted
- Regular catering services may be interrupted, plan for alternative food supplies

## **2.12 School closures**

Settings where children gather face infection prevention and control challenges because children, especially young children, are generally less compliant with effective hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette practices; interact with other students in a way that is likely to increase transmission; and can shed the virus longer than adults.

Schools should prepare for the possible implementation of closures during a pandemic to slow the further spread of the virus in the community. Schools may need to close because of an order from the Medical Officer of Health due to the risk posed by the pandemic, or as a result of other events during a pandemic. For example, if the employer decides to close the space or program due to high rates of illness among employees or significant interruptions to public transportation systems. Regardless of the reason, closures can affect continuity of operations, especially of critical services, and will impact school employees, students and parents of students.

In the event of school closures, students and staff should be discouraged from gathering elsewhere such as shopping malls, restaurants or a friend's house.

Schools should identify times in the past when they have had to close because of events such as labour disruptions or inclement weather and identify lessons learned that could be applied to a pandemic.

### 3.0 Planning Checklist

#### 3.1 Planning checklist - short version

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/no	Comments
Does your school have an emergency plan?		
Have you made your employees aware of emergency response plans?		
Have you identified which tasks and positions would be essential during an emergency?		
Have you considered alternative strategies on how to continue service delivery when normal methods are disrupted?		
Have you developed a service continuity plan for your school for decreasing or altering the services that you offer?		
Have you considered how to keep your school operational with a large number of staff ill and unable to work?		
Do you have a mechanism to monitor increases in staff absenteeism?		
Have you considered how to deal with employees who report to work ill?		
Do you know where to get up-to-date and accurate information about the virus and the pandemic?		
Have you trained your employees on proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette?		
Is your cleaning staff aware of proper disinfecting techniques during a pandemic?		
Have you considered stockpiling necessary supplies?		
In case of a death on-site, do you know who to contact (ambulance, coroner, funeral home)?		
Have you considered how you would communicate information to your staff and parents in an efficient manner?		
Have you considered how you would provide your staff with support and counseling?		

### 3.2 Planning checklist - long version

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
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#### Activation/Termination of Pandemic Response Plan

Who has responsibility for activating the service continuity plan for your school and who is that person's back-up?		
Has your school identified a process through which the decision will be made to activate and terminate the plan?		
Do you have a communication strategy for reaching employees and service partners as a result of having to implement any section of the service continuity plan?		

#### Decision-making and Reporting

Who needs to approve the Pandemic Response Plan?		
Who is identified as being in charge in the event of pandemic and are the roles of the various stakeholders clearly defined?		
Who makes what decisions?		

#### Agencies and Stakeholder Communications

Do you have a list of all relevant agencies and stakeholders and their contact information?		
Who notifies the various stakeholders?		

#### Communications with Staff and the General Public

Who will be responsible for communicating to the employees in your school and who is their back up person(s) to assume this responsibility?		
Have you prepared site-specific notification for closures and contacts for the public?		
Who will be responsible for communicating with the general public?		
How will reduction/temporary termination of regular services be communicated to local stakeholders and the public?		
Who has authority to issue public service announcements/news releases and who is their alternate?		



Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
How fast can these announcements be produced and approved?		
If mail service is interrupted, is there critical mail delivery which you need to make alternative arrangements for?		
Do you know where to get up-to-date and accurate information about the virus and the pandemic? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vaccine and antiviral medications information</li> <li>▪ Infection control</li> <li>▪ Personal care</li> <li>▪ Public health measures</li> </ul>		

### Planning

Who is in charge in the event of a pandemic episode and are the roles of the various stakeholders clearly defined? Who makes what decisions? Who notifies the various stakeholders?		
Who do you need input from both internally and externally to prepare and review a service continuity plan for your school? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Elected officials</li> <li>▪ Legal counsel</li> <li>▪ Community partners</li> <li>▪ Labour unions and bargaining agents</li> </ul>		
Who needs to approve the service continuity plan?		
Is the pandemic service continuity plan integrated with your emergency preparedness plan(s)?		
What is the staff capacity and are there provisions to bring in additional staff or volunteers?		
Have you identified the key services that must be provided? (Note: Consider minor to major lack of availability of staff due to illness)		
Has your school identified possible key functions, staff positions, and supplies for each key service?		

### Testing of the Plan

How will you test and/or evaluate your service continuity plan?		
How will you test your communication systems, e.g., fan-out?		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
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### Training and Orientation

What are your training needs for staff and external stakeholders regarding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ infection control measures?</li> <li>▪ environmental cleaning?</li> <li>▪ equipment use?</li> <li>▪ review of your school's service continuity plan, including explanation of roles and responsibilities?</li> </ul>		
What additional training will volunteers and reassigned staff require?		

### Educational Materials

Have educational materials been prepared?		
Have public education efforts been planned?		

### Human Resources

Is there a list of all employees, complete with telephone numbers (home and business) and job titles (including those recently retired)?		
Does your school maintain a fan-out list to contact employees?		
Is there a contact list of all senior staff within your school?		
If public transit becomes a problem, can employees arrange alternate forms of transportation to work, e.g., carpooling?		
Has your school addressed the issue of staff being unable to report to work due to possible school and daycare closures?		
Do you currently have adequate staffing for regular day-to-day function?		
Do you have a mechanism to monitor increases in staff absenteeism?		
Has your school prepared an inventory of skills and professional competencies in the event that people from your school are required to perform duties/functions in other areas to maintain essential services?		
How has your school planned to maintain the employee payroll?		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
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### Health and Safety

Is there a copy of the Health and Safety manual on site in your school?		
Have insurance and union issues been addressed?		
Has an inventory been prepared for specialized equipment/facilities that may be needed during a pandemic?		
Have liability issues been addressed for volunteers and re-assigned staff?		
Have support care services been planned for employees? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Psychosocial support</li> <li>▪ Grief counselling</li> </ul>		

### Materials and Supplies

Are there clearly stated policies and procedures that cover signing authority and acquisitions?		
Is there a mechanism that will ensure that additional equipment (e.g., cell phones, refrigerators, etc.) can be obtained with minimum delay?		
Who has authority for ordering repair/replacement for equipment and who is their alternate?		
Have you considered developing a 6-8-week stockpile of critical supplies required to maintain your “must do” services, and stockpile of infection control supplies (e.g., alcohol-based hand sanitizers, tissues)?		
Does your school have contact lists for all your suppliers and alternate suppliers?		
Has a recovery phase been planned for (e.g., depleted supplies or backlogs)?		

### Documentation and Record Keeping

Has your school developed appropriate record keeping procedures for such items as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ complaints and issues raised</li> <li>▪ significant decisions that were made</li> <li>▪ regular reporting to provincial/federal governments as required</li> </ul>		
Are there people in your school who have sole access to incoming information (e.g., reports, complaints, etc.) and who are their alternates?		

Planning Issues	Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable	COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process
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### Information and Technology

Does your school maintain a central inventory of passwords to office equipment and electronic files?		
If your information and technology person is ill, who is their alternate?		
Does your school have access to inventory (including serial numbers) of all computer equipment, printers, fax machines, photocopiers in case repairs are needed?		
Does your school have contact lists for all equipment repair persons?		
Does your school have the staff and equipment for a website/telephone call-in line to update staff and parents?		

### Facilities

Could any of the school's services be provided from another work location or from home?		
If necessary, could staff live at the work location or alternative work location for some period of time?		
Who is your security contact should there be a problem with physical access to your work location and who is their alternate?		
How are courier packages generally sent out and received?		

### Procurement of Additional Resources

Who has the responsibility for procurement matters (e.g., ordering resources and/or equipment) during a pandemic?		
Who will be responsible for payment issues related to overtime and/or additional salary issues and who is their alternate?		
Who has the authority to hire contract/temporary workers and to take on volunteers and who is their alternate?		
Is there a pre-approval process in place for purchasing additional supplies? If not, how long does it take for the approval process?		

<b>Planning Issues</b>	<b>Completed Yes/No/Not Applicable</b>	<b>COMMENTS Document who is responsible for each action and the decision-making process</b>
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**Post Pandemic**

What are the immediate lessons learned from the previous wave when planning for multiple pandemic waves?		
Who will be responsible for evaluating your response to the pandemic?		
What factors should be included in the evaluation?		
Who will have the authority to notify the various employees, parents and stakeholders regarding the school's return to full service?		
Who will decide to reinstate full service?		