

COVID-19 Guidance

# **Students with Specialized Healthcare Needs**

August 23, 2021

  
**NOVA SCOTIA**



The details in this document are subject to change based on direction from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health with input from other health partners such as the IWK Health Centre and the Provincial Pediatric Advisory Group. The measures in this document are based on the best available information, practices, and advice provided at this time.

EECD, RCEs, and the CSAP will continue to follow the advice of the Chief Medical Officer and adjust any plans to re-open schools and deliver education services. All operational plans will be in keeping with these guidelines and any future direction or changes provided by Public Health.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to keeping students safe from COVID-19, the most important thing we can do is limit community spread by following the public health measures in place. Staff also follow direction from occupational health and safety in Regional Centres of Education and CSAP.

Low levels of disease in the community will mean low levels at school. For students with specialized and complex healthcare needs, additional measures may need to be put in place to ensure their safety and the safety of staff who work with them. These additional measures will align with public health guidelines for reducing the risk of COVID-19 spread in Nova Scotia communities.

Guidance on these additional measures have been developed in consultation with the IWK Health Centre, Nova Scotia Health Authority, Provincial Pediatric Advisory Group, School Health Partnership Oversight Committee, and the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

The steps outlined in this guidance document are intended to support RCEs/CSAP with planning for those with specialized and/or complex healthcare needs that require additional consideration in relation to COVID-19 so that all students have consistent, reliable, and appropriate connections at school to support their well-being and academic learning. The guidance in this document is based on the current, best available evidence for children and youth, and COVID-19.

Families of students with any pre-existing medical need or condition may have concerns around a safe return to school despite increased rates of vaccinations across the province. Communication around the public health directives so that these students can safely return to school will be very important. This includes encouraging vaccination for all who are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. RCEs/CSAP will take a relational approach when communicating with families with a goal of having students attend school.

Student planning teams are teams that are made up of staff, families, and other professionals as appropriate, that collaborate on decisions regarding instruction, interventions, and evaluation needed to best support individual students, including the developing of health plans of care for students with specialized healthcare needs.

School health partnership nurses identify, co-ordinate and mobilize health, school, and community resources required to assist students who have specific healthcare need(s) and/or medical diagnosis(s) function as independently as possible in the school setting. The school health partnership nurses will play an important role in this process in providing advice and guidance to students, families, and schools and are available by referral through TieNet, the province's confidential student information system.

## 2. SPECIALIZED HEALTHCARE NEEDS

For the purposes of this document, only students with specialized healthcare needs that have identified COVID-19 related implications are being considered for planning purposes. These healthcare needs have been grouped into the three categories below.

These are not the only specialized healthcare needs in Nova Scotia schools, however they are the ones that have been determined to require specific considerations related to transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus\* and therefore require more planning as part of the student's specialized health care or individual program plans.

All students who have specialized health care and other individual needs will continue to receive appropriate support when schools re-open. Most of these students will have a written health plan of care located in TieNet, the school-based student education system. The school-based Plans of Care will integrate appropriate use of PPE and enhanced cleaning to provide additional protections. Some students in the specialized group will require additional monitoring and guidance specific to their unique healthcare needs.



Within the context of low levels of COVID-19 in the community, students with specialized healthcare needs should be at no greater risk of transmitting or acquiring COVID-19 than the general school population.

\*SARS-CoV-2 is the name of the virus while COVID-19 is the name of the disease.

**DAILY SCREENING:**

Schools will clearly communicate to all families the need to monitor their children daily for symptoms before sending them to school.

Schools will give families a copy of Nova Scotia's COVID-19 daily checklist at the beginning of the school year. School staff will keep a copy in the office and at designated drop-off areas.

Staff will review this screening tool requirement with families before the beginning of the school year and regularly throughout the year.

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Daily-COVID-checklist-en.pdf>

Students with complex health conditions may not present an illness in a typical way. The school health partnership nurse will work with the family and the school planning team to include details on how COVID-19 might look specific to the student and how this will be included as part of their daily screening. This information will be included in the plan of care.

**CATEGORIES:**

The following headings group students with specialized healthcare needs into three categories:

1. **Students who require an aerosol generating medical procedure (AGMP)**, (i.e., medication given with a nebulizer or suctioning through a tracheostomy (trach)).
2. **Students who require close contact from school staff for personal care or procedures**, such as students who require assistance and support with toileting, ostomy care, oral and tube feedings, lifts and transfers, mobility. This may also include students who developmentally are not able to follow public health directives and receive individual programming and services in settings other than the common learning environment.
3. **Students who are immunocompromised**, due to medical concerns such as cancer and other diseases/conditions, transplant recipients, or those who require the use of immunosuppressant drugs. There is on-going consultation occurring around how to appropriately plan for students who fall into this category and additional guidance is being developed to help families and student planning teams.

Specialized Healthcare Need	Considerations
<p>Students who require AGMP</p> <p><b>Please note:</b> nebulizer of any liquid (including saline and medication) is an AGMP.</p> <p>Percussion alone is not an AGMP.</p>	<p>Currently, this procedure may be performed in a designated area in the classroom or other area of the school.</p> <p>Ensuring that the student is asymptomatic prior to performing the procedure remains important and students should not attend school if they are unwell.</p> <p>As part of appropriate routine practices and additional precautions required for safe care, if staff hands will be exposed to secretions, they should wear gloves and if their face will be exposed to a splash, spray, cough or sneeze, a non-medical mask and protective eye wear should be worn. Staff to remember to perform Hand Hygiene before and after PPE use so they do not introduce germs to students or themselves.</p> <p>If necessary, Public Health will recommend enhanced measures, that may include, but will not be limited to, the performing of AGMPs in a separate room and/or pre-procedural testing.</p> <p>These enhanced measures will be communicated through established channels within the Regional Centres for Education and Conseil scolaire acadien provincial.</p> <p>If the student becomes unwell while at school, they should return home however, if procedure must be urgently administered, it should be done in a separate room where the person performing the task wears gloves, a medical mask and eye protection.</p>

<b>Specialized Healthcare Need</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
<p>Students who require close contact for personal care or a procedure and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- have continuous secretions and/or</li> <li>- are unable to control their coughs and/or</li> <li>- spit and/or bite”</li> </ul>	<p>Ensuring that the student is asymptomatic prior to performing the procedure remains important and students should not attend school if they are unwell.</p> <p>As part of appropriate routine practices and additional precautions required for safe care, if staff hands will be exposed to secretions, they should wear gloves and if their face will be exposed to a splash, spray, cough or sneeze, a non-medical mask and protective eye wear should be worn.</p> <p>Staff to remember to perform Hand Hygiene before and after PPE use so they do not introduce germs to students or themselves.</p>
<p>Students who require close contact for personal care or a procedure and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- require hand feeding and/or</li> <li>- NVCI procedures</li> </ul>	<p>Ensuring that the student is asymptomatic prior to performing the procedure remains important and students should not attend school if they are unwell.</p> <p>As part of appropriate routine practices and additional precautions required for safe care, if staff hands will be exposed to secretions, they should wear gloves and if their face will be exposed to a splash, spray, cough or sneeze, a non-medical mask and protective eye wear should be worn.</p> <p>Staff to remember to perform Hand Hygiene before and after PPE use so they do not introduce germs to students or themselves.</p>
<p>Students who demonstrate all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pre-existing complex medical conditions and are not able to effectively communicate how they are feeling</li> <li>- whose typical presentation includes symptoms that appear on the Daily COVID-19 screener</li> <li>- require an AGMP</li> </ul>	<p>As it can be difficult to discern whether symptoms are part of these students’ typical presentation or COVID-19 related, the Student Planning Team (SPT) will give particular consideration to the student’s safety and that of other students and staff.</p> <p>Please refer to above guidance re: AGMPs.</p>



<b>Specialized Healthcare Need</b>	<b>Considerations</b>
Students who are immunocompromised	<p>School health partnership nurses and student services coordinators, or designate(s), as determined by the RCE/CSAP, should review specialized healthcare plans for students with specialized and complex healthcare needs that may be associated with a higher risk of severe respiratory infection (eg: COVID-19).</p> <p>Families may also consult with their student’s primary care physician for guidance and direction regarding the student’s healthy and safe return to school.</p> <p>School planning team meetings will be held as required to review specialized healthcare plans for the safe return to school</p> <p>Every student will have access to quality instruction and supports. This includes students with exceptional circumstances such as pre-existing or new specialized and/or complex medical needs.</p>

### 3. EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

If a student has a specialized healthcare need which impacts their ability to attend school in-person due to potential COVID-19 complications, their parent/guardian should contact the school principal. This can include other chronic conditions such as certain respiratory and cardiac conditions that may be considered higher risk.

The school planning team will meet with the family to discuss school level supplemental supports, in addition to the standard public health directives, that may be used to allow the student to safely attend in person.

If after reviewing information from medical specialist(s) and in consultation with the family and the school health partnership nurse, the student planning team determines that the student cannot safely return to school, the principal and RCEs/CSAP will ensure that an individual plan is developed to support the student through a remote learning plan.

Remote learning plans may contain a combination of options such as at-home tutoring, Nova Scotia Virtual School, access to Google Classrooms, etc., and will be determined by the school team, in consultation with the student and family.

There will be regional variation in terms of what at-home learning will look like, and it should be noted that remote learning plans are not the same as home schooling.

A student who has asthma and takes a daily inhaled corticosteroid is not considered immunocompromised.

A student with diabetes that is well managed is not considered immunocompromised.

#### **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

- A student who has asthma and takes a daily inhaled corticosteroid is not considered immunocompromised.
- A student with diabetes that is well managed is not considered immunocompromised