

COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Before and After School Programs 2020-21

The details in this document are subject to change based on direction from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. The measures in this document are based on the best available information, practices, and advice provided.

All operational plans will be in keeping with these guidelines and any future direction or changes provided by Public Health.

Forward

All Nova Scotians must follow the [Public Health Order](#) issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health and direction arising from the Order given under the authority of the Health Protection Act.

Before and after school programs should follow the guidance in this document and may wish to review [Nova Scotia's Back To School Plan Public Health Appendix](#) for information specific to programs located in the school setting. Providers should work closely with school administrators to coordinate accessing shared spaces or resources and to support coordination and clear communication to families.

Programs can find examples of risk mitigation strategies in the foundational documents used to create this guidance: [Risk mitigation tool for child and youth settings operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), [COVID-19 guidance for schools Kindergarten to Grade 12](#) and [Risk mitigation tool for outdoor recreation spaces and activities operating during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

Introduction

Before and after school programs serve an important function in supporting Nova Scotian families during the school year. As such, these programs will be allowed to operate with strong public health measures in place while there is low community spread and while schools are fully open.

In the event of a localized outbreak or increased community transmission, providers and families should be aware that Public Health may need to stop or require modified delivery of these programs. Depending on the circumstance, this could happen with little notice.

This document outlines the COVID-19 public health measures intended to support organizations in operating before and after school programs in the 2020-21 school year.

This guidance document will be modified from time to time, as applicable, to reflect any updated or new advice. Direction from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health must be followed, even if it conflicts with, or is inconsistent with this guidance document.

Scope

For the purpose of this document, a **before and after school program** is a program which:

- Provides before and after school care for children in pre-primary to Grade 6;
- Operates onsite in schools, or offsite in community or private facilities with children being transported to and/or from school by either school bus or transportation provided by the organization;
- Begins before the core day starts in the morning and/or directly after the core day until at least 5:00 p.m., 5 days per week for the entirety of the school year; and
- Is operated or contracted by a regional centre for education (RCE), the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP), school, or community or private organization.

Examples of providers of before and after school programs in scope include the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (EXCEL program), Boys and Girls Club Nova Scotia, and the Nova Scotia-Before and After Program (NS-BAP)¹.

School-age programs licensed under the Nova Scotia Day Care Act and Regulations are not in scope; licensed operators adhere to the Nova Scotia Day Care Act and Regulations and follow the COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Child Care Settings.

Cohorts

Before and after school programs as defined in this document will operate with cohorts of up to 15 children beginning in September 2020.

It is recognized that for before and after school programs to be operational and viable, it may not be possible to limit children in the before and after school program to the class cohort they are participating in throughout the day.

¹ NS-BAP operated by child care providers and licensed under the Nova Scotia Day Care Act and Regulations are not in scope and are required to follow the Nova Scotia Day Care Act and Regulations and the COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Child Care Settings.

In circumstances where children from different class cohorts must interact to participate in the before and after school program, organizations/operators will make efforts to limit interactions to the greatest extent possible.

Best practices to limit interactions between children and reduce transmission of COVID-19 may include:

- Making best efforts to create before and after school program cohorts from the same class cohort;
- Grouping children from the same household in the same cohort where possible;
- Separating cohorts by a minimum of 2 metres;
- Supporting children to minimize direct physical contact;
- Choosing activities that promote physical distancing between children and staff; and
- Making use of outdoor spaces, assigning cohorts to specific spaces or classrooms, and using large, well-ventilated spaces (e.g. gymnasium) as much as possible.

Daily Screening

Families are required to screen their children and staff are required to self-screen daily for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 at home before coming to the before and after school program, using the COVID-19 Daily Checklist <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Daily-COVID-checklist-en.pdf>.

Staying home

Children and staff need to stay home if they are ill, even if their symptoms are mild. The following people should not attend the before and after program:

- Any person who is experiencing symptoms suggestive of COVID-19;
- Any person who travelled outside Atlantic Canada in the previous 14 days;
- Any person who is a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19; and
- Any person who is awaiting a COVID-19 test result.

Designating drop-off and pick-up areas

Before and after school programs should designate drop-off and pick-up areas outside the building (school or offsite location) to facilitate physical distancing between staff and adult family members.

Providers should coordinate with schools or facilities, if leased, to determine designated drop-off and pick-up areas.

Families are not to enter the schools or facilities unless scheduled and approved by the provider. Self-screening using the COVID-19 Daily Checklist <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Daily-COVID-checklist-en.pdf> is required.

Mask Wearing

Staff are required to wear a non-medical mask while inside when within 2 metres of children and other adults.

Children in grade 4 and up are also required to wear a non-medical mask inside.

Staff and children must follow mask protocols as outlined on the provincial coronavirus site <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/masks/>.

Hygiene Practices

Frequent hand washing is important for everyone entering the program from home in the morning or from classrooms in the afternoon. Hands should be washed with soap and water for 20 seconds or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with a minimum alcohol concentration of 60%) should be used.

Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer in areas throughout the school/facility, such as at entry points and outside of classrooms/program spaces. Ensure these are situated so younger children cannot access it without supervision. If alcohol based hand sanitizer is used with younger children, staff should dispense the sanitizer into the child's hand and observe while the child thoroughly rubs in the sanitizer.

Practice hand hygiene (wash hands or use hand sanitizer) often; including but not limited to:

Before:

- Entering the school/classroom
- Eating/drinking/handling food
- Outdoor activities

After:

- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Blowing your nose
- Outdoor activities
- Eating/Drinking
- Cleaning

Cough etiquette should be practiced by coughing and sneezing into the sleeve or a tissue and discard immediately. Staff and children should avoid touching their mouth, nose or eyes.

Avoid sharing personal items (i.e. backpacks, hats, lip chap, food/drinks, etc.)

Signage should be posted to encourage children in hygiene practices.

Essential visitors

There may be cases where programs require the support of other adults in their organizations or provincial based services for monitoring and pedagogical support or to support inclusion of children with special needs. Before and after school programs must determine and list who the essential visitors are for their programs.

All essential visitors must self-screen using the *COVID-19 Daily Checklist* <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Daily-COVID-checklist-en.pdf> before entering a before and after school program. Program staff must keep a record of when essential visitors are in the program or cohort, including dates and times of visits. Scheduling of essential visitors will ensure that the number of adults in the program or with a cohort is limited.

Essential visitors are required to wear non-medical masks inside facilities. Masking protocols must be followed as described at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/masks/>

Essential visitors who are working with a specific child should be supported to maintain physical distancing of 2m / 6ft from the other children in the program where possible.

Increasing time spent outdoors

Outdoor time is recommended for all children as one of the safeguards in reducing the risk of disease transmission. Before and after school programs are encouraged to spend as much time as possible outdoors². Eating outdoors is also encouraged.

How and where children spend time outdoors will look different in each program and will depend on what the environments have to offer. Planning for outdoor time must be consider the following, and if the program is in a school, coordination with the school is necessary:

- Identification of the outdoor space or spaces available (approvals may be required);
- If the space identified is shared with other programs;
- Safety considerations including how physical boundaries are identified for children (in the absence of fencing);
- Hand hygiene;
- Plan if children need to use the washroom while outdoors (supervision, nearest washrooms);
- Plan for eating snack outdoors;
- Access to storage of toys, materials and equipment;
- Cleaning and disinfecting of toys, materials and equipment;
- Appropriate clothing for expected (and unexpected) weather conditions will help children and staff make the most of their time outdoors. Families should be advised of the amount of time to be spent outdoors and what clothing is required, with consideration given to the sociocultural contexts of families and options to address needs (e.g. providing Muddy Buddies).

² As per the NS-BAP Program and Delivery Standards, children must spend a minimum of 60 minutes outside (in the before and/or after time periods) all seasons. This year, providers are encouraged to increase their time outdoors beyond the minimum of 60 minutes.

Environmental Cleaning

Cleaning refers to the removal of visible dirt, grime and impurities. Cleaning does not kill germs but helps remove them from the surface. Disinfecting refers to using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. This is most effective after surfaces are cleaned. Both steps are important to reduce the spread of infection.

Indoor toys are required to be cleaned and disinfected daily. Shared items (e.g. toys, play areas) must be cleaned and disinfected between use or where items become visibly soiled and/or are mouthed. Outdoor toys and play equipment are to be cleaned and disinfected using your regular cleaning schedule.

Toys and materials, where possible, should be batched and organized around a rotation schedule of play and cleaning and disinfecting. The used batch goes into a container to be cleaned and disinfected.

Sensory experiences such as sand, water, slime, playdoh, if offered, must be provided in individual containers, which can then be cleaned and restocked after individual use.

In general, items that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected such as rugs, curtains, dress-up clothes, stuffed animals and sensory play (unless the sensory play can be cleaned and disinfected between use or each child is designated their own sensory play) must be removed.

High touch surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, railings, tables, light switches, etc.) must be cleaned and disinfected frequently (at least twice daily).

Waste must be disposed of regularly and hands must be washed after waste removal.

For before and after school programs located in schools and using shared spaces, programs and schools must coordinate to ensure cleaning and disinfecting of classrooms or other spaces and materials used by the before and after school program is completed at several points in the day depending on the program such as:

- After the before and after school program ends and before the core day begins;
- After the core day ends and the before and after school program begins; and
- After the before and after school program ends.

Programs should consider scheduling outdoor play during the time that the cleaning and disinfecting takes place after the core day for programs located in schools.

A cleaning and disinfecting log should be kept for tracking and demonstrating cleaning schedules.

Snack

Snacks are to be served individually to children by staff and food prepared by approved adults (such as staff or food service staff). Children are not to engage in preparing food or family style eating where they serve themselves.

Eating outdoors is to be encouraged.

Handwashing before and after snack for children and staff is required.

Arranging physical space inside

Physical space inside and outdoors must be arranged to promote space for movement with clear pathways which allow for distancing between staff and cohorts. This may require reducing or removing non-essential items and eliminating clutter.

No sharing of personal items, food or drinks

Minimizing direct physical contact in before and after school programs means no sharing of food or drinks or personal items such as water bottles, backpacks, hats, hair pieces, lip chap, etc. Personal items should be clearly labelled with the child's name to prevent accidental sharing. Self-serving, family style eating or sharing of food is not to be permitted at snack time.

Record keeping & absenteeism

Records must be maintained of children, staff, and essential visitors who are absent and of any unusual symptoms, including name, contact information, time of arrival/departure, screening completion, etc.) to facilitate contact tracing in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case or outbreak.

Managing Symptoms of COVID-19

Children or staff who develop symptoms consistent with possible COVID-19 infection should not remain in the programs, even if the symptoms are mild. It is important that children and staff are supported to report symptoms immediately and be protected from stigmatization.

A space should be designated for individuals who become symptomatic to isolate while awaiting pickup, allowing for a 2 metre separation from other children and staff.

If a child or staff develops symptoms consistent with possible COVID-19 infection, they should immediately wash their hands, don a mask (medical mask if available but non-medical mask is acceptable), report their symptoms, avoid contact with other staff and children and go home to isolate. Staff supervising a child with symptoms while awaiting pickup should also wear a mask (medical if available) and may choose to wear a face shield for eye protection if they are unable to maintain 2m / 6ft physical distance. They should perform frequent hand hygiene. Families should be advised to contact 811 for an assessment.

Additional environmental cleaning should occur if a child or staff develops symptoms, with focus on high-touch areas and areas where the staff or child spent time.

If concerned, contact your local Public Health office to seek further advice.

Outbreak Management

In the event that a case of COVID-19 is confirmed to be connected to a before and after school program, Public Health will provide additional guidance including ensuring that appropriate supports are in place to coordinate the response. Public Health is responsible for case management and contact follow-up of all COVID-19 cases, and for determining the need for individual or public notifications. One (1) confirmed case of COVID-19 in a before and after school program would be considered an outbreak.

Public Health actions and directions may include, but are not limited to:

- Contact tracing, which involves identifying contacts of a positive case and contacting those individuals
- Requesting records that identify cohorts/groups of staff, children and essential visitors in the before and after school program for a specified time frame
- Testing of staff and children that may have been exposed to a positive case

- Enhancing environmental cleaning
- Assessing need for facility/program/school closure

Before and after school programs are expected to work with Public Health to ensure a prompt response to cases of COVID-19 that may have been exposed in or may have attended a before and after school program.

If a confirmed case of COVID-19 is identified in a school where a before and after school program is operating, the before and after school program will receive guidance from Public Health if any action is required..

Communication with Families

Where possible, programs should limit face-to-face communication and provide information via phone or email.

Messaging to families should reinforce the requirements in this document (i.e. screening for symptoms in the morning, hand hygiene, staying home when sick, masking where age required, etc.) and provide any updated guidance.

References

Nova Scotia's Back to School Plan: COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Schools (Pre-primary to 12) <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/back-to-school-plan.pdf>.

COVID-19 guidance for schools Kindergarten to Grade 12
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/guidance-schools-childcare-programs.html>

Nova Scotia COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for Child Care Settings <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/COVID-19-Childcare-setting-guidance.pdf>

Nova Scotia COVID-19 Return to Day Camp Guidelines <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/COVID-19-Return-to-Day-Camp-Guidelines.pdf>

Nova Scotia Daily Covid-19 Checklist <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Daily-COVID-checklist-en.pdf>.

Capable, Confident and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework
<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/nselearningcurriculumframework.pdf>

Public Health Agency of Canada Risk Mitigation Tool for Child and Youth Settings Operating During the COVID-19 Pandemic <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/covid-19-risk-mitigation-tool-child-youth-settings-operating-during-pandemic.html>