

February 4, 2021

Dear students, parents, caregivers and staff,

As you may have heard, today the Minister of Education, Jennifer Whiteside, and the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, held a joint press conference to announce updates to the health and safety guidelines for K-12 schools. I'm reaching out to let you know what the enhancements will be, and what to expect as we introduce the new recommendations.

First: we know schools continue to be the best place for most kids to learn and grow. And as we look at what the data shows us, we also know that the layers of safety measures in place within our schools are working ... with transmission rates inside our province's schools being lower than what we see in the general community and other environments. But we're also continuing to learn, improve and adapt as we move through this together.

Today's announced enhancements will build on the layers of protection that are already in place, in these specific ways:

- **Enhanced mask guidelines***

Effective in New Westminster Schools on Monday, February 8th

All K-12 staff and all middle and secondary students will be required to wear masks in all indoor areas – even within learning groups – except for when they are sitting or standing at their individual seat or workstation in a classroom, when there is a barrier in place, or when they are eating or drinking.

*Mask wearing at other times, or for students in Elementary settings, continues to be a personal choice that will be supported and respected.

- **Additional guidelines for Physical Education and Music classes**

- High intensity physical activities are to be held outside, whenever possible.
- Shared equipment, such as weight machines or musical instruments (like drums or guitars) can only be used if they've been properly sanitized between each use.
- Students playing instruments must be spaced at a minimum of 2 meters apart, with masks required when singing.

- **Increased protocols for staff-only spaces**

- **Introducing a new K-12 Health Check App**

The Ministry of Education has worked with Public Health and the BCCDC to develop a website and mobile app (available for iPhone and Google Android users), as a voluntary alternative or additional tool for students and parents to use when completing their required daily health checks. This app *does not track location* and is not a tool meant to support the contact tracing process: it is only intended to support the daily health checks already in place, and offer guidance to those questioning whether or not a student should attend school. No personal information will be either collected or stored.

As noted above, the extended mask rules will go into effect starting Monday. Over the coming days and weeks our various teams will delve into the updated BCCDC guide, working with our leadership and Health and Safety committees. We will support schools in introducing and communicating the enhancements with staff, students and families.

So, we have some additional work to do now. But it builds on all we've done so far.

Thankfully we've seen how the layers of protection are working and how committed you are to being great partners in following the recommendations and guidelines. We'll continue to work with all the health authorities and safety leads to make improvements where and when they are required. It's all part of how we're collectively keeping New Westminster Schools safer.

In appreciation,



Karim Hachlaf
Superintendent of Schools / CEO