

January 14, 2022

Dear parents and guardians,

Last Monday, schools in the Fraser Health region returned for another term of in-person schooling. While some schools had higher than historical levels of attendance this past week, others have not.

Based on experience from previous waves of COVID-19, and through regular discussions with school leadership, we believe that the two main reasons behind low attendance in some schools this first week back have likely been due to the following:

1. Staff and students had COVID-19 prior to school starting and are isolating or are close household contacts to cases and needing to isolate.
2. Parents and guardians have kept their children home due to concerns about an increased risk of COVID-19 in schools.

With respect to the first reason above, COVID-19 case rates continue to be higher than they have ever been during this pandemic. It is no surprise that there are a number of individuals needing to stay home right now because they have COVID-19 or are a close contact of someone who has COVID-19. This does not represent an increased risk of COVID-19 in schools as these individuals would not be attending while infectious. For information on what cases and close contacts are instructed to do, please refer to the BCCDC [website](#).

With respect to the second reason above, I want to reassure you that school is safe and there are layers of protection in place to protect staff, students and families. In our region, we began implementing a set of enhanced health and safety measures in October 2021, aimed at increasing distancing between staff and students and limiting mixing between different grades. These measures are now part of the updated K-12 guidelines being used by schools.

In addition to these school safety measures, schools continue to remind staff and students of the importance of daily health checks, hand hygiene, and consistent use of well-fitting masks. Public Health continues to work with schools to monitor the level of COVID-19 in schools. We receive regular reports of school attendance levels that we analyze against reported cases of COVID-19 among staff and students to see if additional steps need to be taken to address increases in COVID-19 activity. It is important that anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 report their result online so that we can better monitor what is happening at schools. To report your results online, visit: <https://reportcovidresults.bccdc.ca/>

Nearly 60 per cent of children ages 5 to 11 in the Fraser Health region have yet to receive their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. If you are a parent or guardian of a child between the ages of 5 to 11 who has not received their first dose of vaccine, please get your child registered and booked for their first dose. This is the most important step that you can take to protect your child from severe health outcomes of COVID-19. Vaccination has been proven safe and effective for children ages 5 to 11. It is true that children have continued to have the lowest rates of hospitalizations due to COVID-19, but they can and do occur

For more information about the vaccine for 5 to 11 year olds, I encourage you to read the [Summary of National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\) statement: Recommendation on the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine \(10 mcg\) in children 5 to 11 years of age](#).

An extensive FAQ is also available on Immunize BC at <https://immunizebc.ca/COVID-19-vaccines-FAQ-5-to-11>

If you would like to speak to someone about the COVID-19 vaccine for children, please reach out to our COVID-19 Call Centre at 778-368-0123 or your family doctor/nurse practitioner.

You can register and book your child's vaccine here: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/vaccine/register>.

K-12 schools continue to be safe places for children to learn in-person during the pandemic. For parents and guardians, we look forward to your children returning to school to learn, be with their friends and peers and be part of a safe school environment.

Sincerely,

Ariella Zbar MD, CCFP, MPH, MBA, FRCPC  
Medical Health Officer, Fraser Health Authority