

Newfoundland & Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research

# Reopening Schools: Mitigating the Risks

#### Disclaimer:

This Quick Response Report was published on May 21, 2020. Given the rapidly changing nature of the coronavirus pandemic, some of the references included in this report may quickly become outof-date. We further caution readers that researchers at the Newfoundland & Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research are not experts on infectious diseases and are relaying work produced by others. This report has been produced quickly and it is not exhaustive, nor have the included studies been critically appraised.

# Original Inquiry

What approaches are being taken in other jurisdictions to mitigate the risks associated with reopening schools? Also, are there any published guidelines or articles on this topic?

# Summary

We found a number of plans and guidance documents related to the reopening of schools from two provinces in Canada as well as from several international jurisdictions. These are included in the first section of the report below. In addition, we found eight guidance documents from organizations such as the WHO, CDC, UNESCO, etc., one systematic review, three expert commentaries/editorials, two other reviews, one primary study, and seven news articles, all of which are included below.

# Reopening Schools in Canada and in other International Jurisdictions For the section below please note:

- We included only plans/guidance that included a focus on mitigating the risks associated with reopening schools.
- We listed information from government departments or health authorities as the main entries for each jurisdiction and then added related examples, documents, or news articles, where applicable.
- In some cases, where language was a barrier or details were not specified in other documents, we have included more detail from related news articles.

# Reopening Schools in Canada

#### **British Columbia**

Government of British Columbia. BC's restart plan. May 6, 2020. (LINK)

"An announcement on a phased approach to resuming in-class instruction will be made in the coming weeks. This will not be a return to normal. With weeks left in the school year, we anticipate many kids will not return to the classroom until September. But we are also exploring



- ways to safely get some kids back to school before the summer, to allow more parents to return to work."
- "For more information on protective measures that will be required of schools and post-secondary institutions, please refer to the <u>BC COVID-19 Go-Forward Management Strategy (PDF, 634KB)</u> and the <u>BC COVID-19 Go-Forward Management Checklist (PDF, 320KB)</u>."
- Related documents:
  - o BCCDC. Childcare & Schools. (LINK)
    - Describes measures to reduce transmission in k-12 school settings that will be incorporated into BC's plans
  - o BCCDC. COVID-19: Public health guidance for K-12 school settings. April 3, 2020. (LINK)
  - o Government of British Columbia. Safe & Health Schools. (LINK)
    - Contains frequently asked questions and education resources for parents during COVID-19.
- Related news article:
  - O Global News. Here's how B.C. plans to reopen schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic. May 7, 2020. (Link)

#### Quebec

Government of Quebec. Safety Measures for workers and children in elementary schools and daycare services during COVID-19. May 5, 2020. (Link)

- Provides guidance about: adopting safe behaviours, reorganizing of rooms, and health and hygiene measures
- Related documents:
  - o Government of Quebec. Questions and answers on education and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Last updated on May 12, 2020. (Link)
  - o Government of Quebec. Safe return to school. No date. (Link)
    - Describes conditions that are in place to welcome students back to school and guidance for after school and daycare services.
    - Topics discussed include: school transportation, keeping a distance while maintaining personal ties, practising good hygiene habits, focusing on core subjects and skills, and a different way of playing during recess.
- Related news articles:
  - CBC News. Schools in greater Montreal area will be closed until September. May 14, 2020.
     (LINK)
  - o Freshdaily. The Quebec schools reopening plan, explained. May 11, 2020. (LINK)

# Reopening Schools in other International Jurisdictions

#### Australia

Australian Government, Department of Health. Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advice on reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools (24 April 2020). April 25, 2020. (LINK)

• Includes information on: physical distancing, risks to vulnerable populations in schools, hygiene, routine care, first aid, management of suspected and confirmed cases, environmental cleaning, and psychological and physical well-being



- E-safety links: <u>Tips for staying safe online during the COVID-19 pandemic</u>, <u>COVID-19: keeping schools and learning safe online</u>, <u>COVID-19: an online safety kit for parents and carers</u>, <u>Advice booklet for parents and carers</u>
- Related webpages:
  - o Australian Government, Department of Education, Skills and Employment. **Coronavirus** (COVID-19) information for schools and students. Last modified, May 15, 2020. (LINK)
- Related state/territorial documents and webpages:
  - NSW Department of Education. A guide to NSW school students returning to face-to-face learning. Updated May 20, 2020. (LINK)
  - NSW Government. Education Information about COVID-19 (coronavirus) and NSW schools, universities and childcare centres. Last updated May 11, 2020. (LINK)
  - o Queensland Government. Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schools. May 18, 2020. (LINK)
  - Northern Territory Government, Australia. Information for parents and carers about NTG schools for Term 2, 2020. Last updated April 22, 2020. (LINK)
    - Also see <u>Learning Together Website</u>
  - Victoria State Government. Learning from Home: Advice for schools about how they can
    ensure learning continuity for their students during periods of disruption caused by
    coronavirus (COVID-19). 2020 (LINK)
- Related news articles:
  - 7 News. Parents left confused and concerned as New South Wales schools set to reopen.
     May 18, 2020. (LINK)
  - The Age. First students back to school on May 26, Premier announces. May 12, 2020.
     (LINK)

### Austria

Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research. Stage plan for activating school operations. Updated as of May 14, 2020. (LINK)

- Open with Google Chrome and choose the option to translate to English.
- Provides a summary of the plan of how schools will reopen. Summary sections include information on the gradual reactivation of the school system (with timelines), relevant details on reducing the number of pupils in classes, and information on protection and hygiene measures.
- Related document:
  - Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research. Coronavirus (COVID-19) As of May 14, 2020. Updated as of May 14, 2020. (LINK)
    - o Contains links to FAQs for schools and parents regarding the plan for activating school operations (see above), and hygiene measures.

#### Belgium

Belgian Government. Exit strategy: Start of Phase 2 from 18 May. May 13, 2020. (LINK)

- "During this phase, schools will gradually reopen for some primary and secondary pupils, under strict organisational conditions. Pre-schools will remain closed at this stage and higher education has already planned through to the end of the academic year in cooperation with the community authorities."
- Related documents:
  - o Belgian Government. Frequently Asked Questions: Education. 2020. (LINK)
  - Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Partial resumption of lessons: measures relating to PMS centers. May 8, 2020. (LINK)



- Open in Google Chrome and choose the option to translate into English.
- "The National Security Council (CNS) of April 24 has decided to adopt a
  deconfinement plan involving in particular a partial resumption of lessons and
  educational activities for students in schools, from May 18, 2020, if all the
  sanitary conditions are met."
- Related news article:
  - The Brussels Times. Flemish schools further reduce pupils returning to class. May 12, 2020. (LINK)
    - "One in five Flemish primary schools will restart classes for only one or two grades on Friday, opting to bring in fewer pupils than authorised under Belgium's National Security Council's guidelines. The schools do not have enough classrooms or staff members to make sure everything can be handled safely, according to a sample of some 200 schools taken by the Flemish Education Inspectorate."

#### China

Ministry of Education, the People's Republic of China. **MOE convenes videoconference for expert advice on reopening schools**. April 23, 2020. (LINK)

- Related documents:
  - Ministry of Education, the People's Republic of China. Guidelines for the prevention and control of new coronavirus pneumonia in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and colleges are published. March 12, 2020. (LINK)
    - Open in Google Chrome and choose the option to translate into English to see document description. Full guidelines are provided but these are in Chinese.
  - o Taiwan Centers for Disease Control. **Guidelines for large-scale public gatherings in the** wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. March 4, 2020. (LINK)
  - Taiwan Centers for Disease Control. Government agencies working in unison to ensure proper cleaning and disinfection procedures for the upcoming school semester. February 19, 2020. (LINK)
  - Ministry of Education of China, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China.

    Notice of arrangement for "suspension of school does not stop learning" during the postponement for the opening of primary and secondary schools. February 12, 2020.

    (LINK)
    - Open with Google Chrome and choose the option to translate into English
    - Examples of online learning include: national cloud platform, Open dedicated TV channels, online learning platform, Provide electronic versions of relevant teaching materials free of charge
- Related news articles:
  - Beijing Kids Blog. Updates: The Latest in Beijing School News. Updated May 13, 2020.
     (LINK)
  - Beijing News. Shanghai non-graduation grades return to school in batches and start high school and junior high school on May 6th. April 20, 2020. (LINK)
    - Open in Google Chrome and choose option to translate into English
  - The Diplomat. Quarantined: China's Online Education in the Pandemic. With schools closed across the country to combat COVID-19, China has turned to online learning. The results have been mixed. March 26, 2020. (LINK)
  - Reuters. Taiwan school uses dividers during lunch to counter coronavirus. March 13, 2020.
     (LINK)



#### Denmark

Danish Health Authority. Letter to parents in connection with the reopening of day care and elementary schools. April 15, 2020. (LINK)

- "The children will be spending much more time out of doors and fewer children assembled in the same area."
- Related document:
  - Danish Health Authority. Questions and answers on novel coronavirus. Updated May 13, 2020. (LINK)
- Related news articles:
  - BBC News. How reopened schools in Denmark keep children safely apart. May 12, 2020.
     (LINK)
  - The New York Times. In Denmark, the Rarest of Sights: Classrooms Full of Students. April 18, 2020. (LINK)

#### Germany

Berlin.de. Preventing coronavirus infection in Berlin – frequently asked questions: Children, young people, schools, and higher education. May 8, 2020. (LINK)

• This page describes how "Classroom instruction in schools is gradually being expanded." It includes a summary of the plan for various grades.

Hamburg.de. After the May holidays, school and house lessons alternate for all students. May 6, 2020. (LINK)

- Use Chrome to open and choose the option to translate to English
- "In Hamburg this week there is already classroom instruction for grades 6, 10, 11 and 12 of high schools, for grades 9, 10, 12 and 13 of district schools, for all fourth classes of elementary schools as well as for pupils in special schools and Vocational schools started. The students learn in small learning groups alternately at school and at home."
- "After the May holidays from May 25th, pupils of the previously missing class levels should now receive at least five or six hours of classroom instruction at least once a week."
- "...only small learning groups with a maximum of 15 pupils continue to be taught in face-to-face classes at school. In the future, too, all schoolchildren will also have to study at home in so-called distance learning."
- Related news articles:
  - o Vox. **Germany is reopening**. Cautiously. May 1, 2020. (LINK)
  - The Local. **State by state: When (and how) will Germany's schools open again?** Updated April 23, 2020. (LINK)
    - Summarizes the approach various states in Germany are taking to reopen schools, "The plan still requires final government approval."

#### Japan

- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Japan. [COVID-19] Information about MEXT's measures. No date. (LINK)
  - o A summary of school closure announcements and updates. It contains school guidance links that are relevant; however, they are not in English.
- Relevant news articles:



- Kyodo News. Guide to reduce virus risks issued for schools before reopening. March 24, 2020. (LINK)
- The Japan Times. Guidelines on curbing virus issued as Japan's schools set to reopen.
   March 24, 2020. (LINK)
- Asia & Pacific News. Japan gov't issues guidelines for reopening schools to reduce virus risks. March 24, 2020. (LINK)

#### **Netherlands**

Dutch National Government. Frequently asked questions about the corona virus and primary and special education. 2020. (LINK)

- Use Chrome to open and choose the option to translate to English
- "Primary schools reduce the group size in the classroom; children go to school 50% of the time.
   Schools themselves decide how they organize the 50% teaching time, which is based on whole days of education."
- Related documents: Note full documents are in Dutch but summary pages contain some information
  - o Lesopafstand.nl. Roadmap at school again: Primary Education. 2020. (LINK)

#### New Zealand

Public Health Response Strategy Team. Control measures to deliver COVID-19 strategies: Education sector evidence review. April 13, 2020. (LINK)

- Not peer reviewed
- "This working paper presents a review of evidence relating to COVID-19 and education settings. It forms part of background work commissioned by the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) by the Director of Public Health to help inform the response to COVID-19."

#### Norway

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. **Guidelines on infection control for school steps 1-7. Steps during the covid-19 outbreak 2020**. February 13, 2020. (LINK)

- Open in Google Chrome and click translate to English upper right corner to read page
- "For the youngest pupils/pupils with special needs, it is difficult to regulate distance to others. Then the most important measure will be to limit the number of close contacts to each student and employee, for example by having smaller groups and having permanent employees for each group / class. Older students can more easily adhere to distance advice and other infection prevention measures and the groups may therefore be somewhat larger."
- Related documents:
  - Norwegian Institute of Public Health. Advice and information for children and adolescents.
     Updated May 8, 2020. (LINK)
  - o Norwegian Homeschooling Federation. Corona Update: April 22, 2020. (LINK)
    - Open in Google Chrome and choose option to translate into English
  - Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Infection control guidelines for childcare centres, schools and after school clubs. Spring 2020. (LINK)
    - Open in Google Chrome and choose option to translate into English
- Related news articles:
  - The Local. Opening schools has not rekindled epidemic in Norway, say authorities. May 11, 2020. (LINK).



The Local. What you need to know about Norway's schools reopening. April 22, 2020.
 (LINK)

#### Singapore

Ministry of Health Singapore. End of circuit breaker, phased approach to resuming activities safely. May 19, 2020. (LINK)

- "Students from graduating cohorts at primary and secondary levels will attend school daily, while other cohorts will rotate weekly, alternating between Home-Based Learning (HBL) and returning to school for lessons... All staff and students will be required to wear masks or face shields when in school or on campus. Further details will be provided by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the respective educational institutions."
- Related document:
  - Ministry of Health Singapore. Easing the tighter circuit breaker measures, preparing for gradual resumption of activity after June 1. May 2, 2020. (LINK)
- Related news article:
  - The Corona Pandemic. Coronavirus: Singapore allows some schools, trades to resume activities in June, in 'first phase' of reopening. May 19, 2020. (LINK)

#### Switzerland

Switzerland Federal Office of Public Health. **New coronavirus: Recommendations for the workplace and schools**. May 2020. (LINK)

- "Classroom teaching at pre-school and at primary and lower secondary schools resumed on 11 May. The cantons are free to decide what form that should take. Special basic principles form the basis for schools to devise sets of precautionary measures to protect schoolchildren and teaching staff from infection with the coronavirus."
- "On 8 June, classroom teaching is expected to be able to resume at upper secondary and other schools. This includes upper-secondary schools, tertiary level and continuing education and training institutions. The Federal Council will decide on further steps to ease measures on 27 May. Special basic principles apply for educational institutions that they can use as a framework for preparing a set of precautionary measures. The sets of precautionary measures, which apply to schoolchildren, students and teaching staff alike, are intended to protect against infection with the coronavirus."
- Related News article:
  - Reuters. Swiss back-to-school angst illustrates worries around easing lockdowns. May 10, 2020. (LINK)

#### **United Kingdom**

Gov.UK, Department for Education. Guidance planning guide for primary schools. May 14, 2020. (LINK)

Gov.UK, Department for Education. Opening schools for more children and young people: initial planning framework for schools in England. Updated May 12, 2020. (LINK)

Gov.UK, Department for Education. Coronavirus (COVID-19): Implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings. Last updated May 12, 2020. (LINK)

• Contains guidance for: effective infection protection and control; PPE; shielded and clinically vulnerable children, young people, and adults; living with a shielded or clinically vulnerable



person; class or group sizes; how to implement protective measures in an education setting before wider opening on 1 June; and how to operate when open. This document also provides answers to additional questions.

Gov.UK, Department for Education. Actions for educational and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020. Last updated May 12, 2020. (LINK)

#### Related documents:

- Gov.UK, Public Health England and Department for Education. Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for educational settings. Last updated April 7, 2020. (LINK)
  - o Includes poster about education guidance from Public Health England (LINK)
- Health Protection Scotland. Core COVID-19 information and guidance for general (non-healthcare) settings. May 1, 2020. (LINK)

## Guidance from Organizations

CDC. Considerations for schools. Updated May 19, 2020. (LINK)

- Topics discussed include: guiding principles to keep in mind, promoting behaviours that reduce spread, maintaining healthy environments, maintaining healthy operations and preparing for when someone gets sick.
- Related documents:
  - CDC. Public health considerations for reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.
     No date. (LINK)
  - CDC. CDC activities and initiatives supporting the COVID-19 response and the president's plan for opening America up again. May 2020. (LINK)
  - o CDC. Guidance for cleaning and disinfecting. Last reviewed May 7, 2020. (LINK)
  - CDC. Interim Guidance for Administrators of US K-12 Schools and Child Care Programs to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). March 25, 2020. (LINK)
  - o CDC. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Checklist for teachers & parents. Last reviewed March 12, 2020. (LINK)
  - o CDC. Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility. Last reviewed April 14, 2020. (LINK)
  - o CDC. Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes. April 28, 2020. (LINK)

Melnick, H. et al. Reopening schools in the context of COVID-19: Health and safety guidelines from other countries (policy brief). Learning Policy Institute. May 15, 2020. (LINK)

 "This brief compiles preliminary information on health and safety guidelines from five countries that have continued or reopened schools during the COVID-19 outbreak: China, Denmark, Norway, Singapore, and Taiwan."

The American Academy of Pediatrics. **COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Return to In-person Education in Schools**. May 5, 2020. (LINK)

Provides considerations for planning as children return to schools and includes sections on:
 Student Considerations, Environmental Considerations, Preparing for the Future and Additional Information.



National Association of Independence Schools. **Coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance for schools**. Last updated May 8, 2020. (LINK)

 Offers considerations for schools that are providing online learning, non-internet-based remote learning, and a combination of online and non-online learning plans.

The World Bank Group. **The COVID-19 Pandemic: Shocks to Education and Policy Responses,** May, 2020. (LINK)

UNESCO et al. Framework for reopening schools. April, 2020. (LINK)

- "When select schools have been identified for reopening, six key dimensions should be used to
  assess their states of readiness and inform planning: policy, financing, safe operations, learning,
  reaching the most marginalized and wellbeing/protection. Policy considerations and financial
  requirements together create the enabling environment needed to support each of the other
  dimensions."
- Includes a table that provides guidance for safe operations, learning (remotely), wellbeing and
  protection, and reaching marginalized people prior to reopening, during the reopening process,
  as well as once schools have opened.
- Related article:
  - UNESCO. Reopening schools: When, where and how? May 13, 2020. (LINK)

WHO. Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Technical Guidance: Guidance for schools, workplaces & institutions. March 2020. (LINK)

- Relevant links on this page include: <u>Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools</u> (March 2020), <u>Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19</u>
- Related documents:
  - WHO. Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19. May 10, 2020. (LINK)

Government of Canada. Public health guidance for schools (K-12) and childcare programs (COVID-19). February 28, 2020. (LINK)

• Archived: "This page is under review and will be updated. Please visit the provincial and territorial resources for COVID-19 page for updated guidance specific to your province or territory."

# A Systematic Review

Viner et al. School closure and management practises during coronavirus outbreaks including COVID-19: A rapid systematic review. The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health. April 6, 2020. (LINK)

"Policy makers and researchers should also look to other school social distancing interventions
that are much less disruptive than full school closure and might substantially contribute to
maintaining the control of this pandemic. Although strong evidence is not available for the
effectiveness of these practices, they might be implementable with much less disruption,
financial costs, or harms. Modelling and observational studies are urgently needed to guide policy
on the opening of schools once the pandemic is under control."

### Other Reviews

Saran, A. Evidence from Campbell reviews on social policy responses to Covid-19. April 17, 2020. (LINK)



"With the Covid-19 school closures, we need more research on how to deliver such programmes
using online platforms, with consideration for access to digital technology for these students.
Many countries use online classes, radio, television and text messaging to support access to
remote learning during the pandemic."

The World Bank. Brief: How countries are using edtech (including online learning, radio, television, texting) to support access to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020 (LINK)

# **Expert Opinion**

Bryant et al. Safely back to school after coronavirus closures. Mckinsey & Company. April 29, 2020 (LINK)

• "Each school system will therefore need to evaluate its health and safety measures to fit its resources and capabilities across four major categories: school infrastructure can facilitate both physical distancing and hygiene protocols; scheduling and staffing; transportation and food service; and behavioural policies and norms."

Vanhems, P. SARS-CoV2 infection and primary school closure. Eurosurveillance. April 16, 2020. (LINK)

"Attack rates would differ according to grade or age, which determine the different contact
patterns between children and would make it possible to adapt infection control measures.
However, a more discriminant risk estimation by age at onset of a public health emergency would
appear not to be useful but might be helpful regarding strategies of re-opening schools with
sequential access to courses."

Zhang et al. Suspending classes without stopping learning: China's education emergency management policy in the COVID-19 outbreak. J. Risk Financial Manag. March 13, 2020. (LINK)

# Primary Research

**Domenico et al.** Expected impact of reopening schools after lockdown on COVID-19 epidemic in Île-de-France. **May 5, 2020.** medRxiv. (LINK)

- "This article is a preprint and has not been certified by peer review. It reports new medical research that has yet to be evaluated and so should not be used to guide clinical practice."
- "Based on the estimated situation on May 11, no substantial difference in the epidemic risk is predicted between progressive and prompt reopening of pre-schools and primary schools, thus allowing full attendance of younger children mostly in need of resuming learning and development. Reopening would require however large-scale trace and testing to promptly isolate cases, in addition to moderate social distancing interventions. Full attendance in middle and high schools is instead not recommended. Findings are consistent across different assumptions on the relative transmissibility of younger children and for small increase of the reproductive number possibly due to decreasing compliance to lockdown."

#### News Articles

- WebMD News from HealthDay. Can schools really reopen safely? May 11, 2020. (LINK)
- The Canadian Press. A look at how provinces plan to emerge from COVID-19 shutdown. May 11, 2020. (LINK)
- CTV News. Health officials looking at ways to reopen schools safely. May 6, 2020. (LINK)
- Insider. How 6 countries are opening up schools again, with temperature checks, outdoor classes, and spaced out desks. May 4, 2020. (LINK)



- World Economic Forum. COVID-19: Countries around the world are reopening their schools. This is what it looks like. May 2, 2020. (LINK)
- NPR. 9 ways schools will look different when (and if) they reopen. April 24, 2020. (LINK).
- Global News. What will Canadian schools look like after COVID-19? Here's what could change. April 17, 2020. (LINK)

# Methodology

Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research (NLCAHR) COVID-19 Quick Response reports are initiated by, and shared with, our partners in the provincial health system, including the four Regional Health Authorities, the Departments of Health and Community Services and Children, Seniors and Social Development, and public health officials.

NLCAHR staff work with topic submitters to clarify the research question. We then search for related systematic reviews, meta-analyses, other reviews, interim and other guidance statements, primary research, expert opinion and health and science reporting.

We use several search strategies, with a focus on the following databases:

- CADTH
- Canadian Pharmacists Association
- Campbell Collaboration
- Cochrane Collaboration
- <u>Centre for Disease Control</u> (CDC)
- Centre for Evidence Based Medicine (CEBM)
- Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
- Health Canada
- Joanna Briggs Institute
- Johns Hopkins
- MedRxiv
- National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)
- National Library of Medicine
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- <u>Trip Da</u>tabase
- World Health Organization

This report was prepared by Sarah Mackey, Christie Warren, and Pablo Navarro.

For more information, contact pnavarro@mun.ca.

