

January 4, 2022

**PROVINCE TO IMPLEMENT PHASED-IN APPROACH FOR RETURN TO SCHOOL
IN JANUARY**

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**Most Students to Learn Remotely Until Jan. 17 to Ensure Schools Can Prepare for
Return to In-Person Learning: Premier**

As a proactive measure, the Manitoba government is shifting to a one-week remote learning period for most Manitoba students after the holiday break to ensure schools can implement enhanced measures for in-person learning, Premier Heather Stefanson and Education Minister Cliff Cullen announced today.

“Our government’s number one priority is to protect the health and well-being of all Manitobans, especially our children, youth and most vulnerable citizens,” said Stefanson. “Today we are announcing a slight adjustment for the return to classes to give schools additional time to implement enhanced protocols to ensure in-person learning for all students can continue under our pandemic plans and to give public health more time to learn about the omicron variant’s effects in Manitoba. We know our children learn best in a classroom setting and it is our goal to ensure they can return to the classroom as quickly as possible.”

Effective Jan. 10, 2022, a phased-in approach will be applied to allow students of critical service workers in kindergarten to Grade 6 and all high-risk students and students with special learning needs in kindergarten to Grade 12 to attend school if no alternate care is available. Current plans are to have all other students return to in-person learning on Jan. 17.

Manitoba Education has heard from stakeholders this phased-in approach will give school divisions more time to address expected staffing shortages and develop plans for the implementation of enhanced measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This will also allow schools time to prepare to move to the Restricted (Orange) level on Manitoba’s Pandemic Response System.

Child-care facilities that offer twelve months of service, including centres in schools, will remain open and are strongly encouraged to prioritize children of critical service workers. School-age child-care facilities that operate based on the school calendar and do not provide service during school breaks will offer services to children of critical service workers requiring before- and after-school care.

Effective Monday, Jan. 10, licensed centres and child-care homes will be able to apply for additional funding support to offset the loss of parent fees. This will include situations where a facility must reduce capacity due to staffing shortages or if a facility is required

to close by public health officials due to COVID-19. Details on how to apply will be provided directly to facilities.

“We know in-person learning is best for students but we are still learning about how the omicron variant will affect our health-care system and Manitobans in the longer term,” said Dr. Jazz Atwal, deputy chief provincial public health officer. “This change will allow us more time to study the data we have and provide any needed additional advice to the education sector and families as we go forward.”

Atwal reminded Manitobans they should reduce the number of close contacts in their household at this time. That includes staying home as much as possible, not gathering with people from outside their household and following the public health orders. In addition, he urged people to get vaccinated and get their booster shots as soon as they are eligible to reduce their risk of contracting COVID-19.

The minister noted several enhanced measures have been put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 in schools and will be expanded in the coming days including:

- distributing 500,000 rapid tests to all schools for students from kindergarten to Grade 6 and planning to expand access to rapid tests for all Manitobans as the rapid testing kit supply increases in Manitoba, particularly for schools with high case counts of COVID-19; and
- requiring medical masks for all staff during this high transmission period and allowing students to wear a well-fitting mask with at least three layers and schools to provide masks for students if needed. Manitoba will be distributing at least five million more child and adult medical masks over the next eight weeks to increase supply in schools and support increased demand.

The minister noted schools across the province continue to implement enhanced ventilation projects in accordance with provincial ventilation guidelines for schools.

Vaccination also continues to be a priority with 168 school clinics and 104 after-school clinics held in the month of December, which provided 10,812 vaccine doses. Manitobans over age 18 eligible for booster shots can attend any immunization site, including physicians' offices and pharmacies, community clinics and after-hours clinics at schools.

Cullen noted the Manitoba government is also investing up to \$80 million in new funding for Manitoba schools during the 2021-22 school year to help address wage agreements for teachers and other cost pressures. Today's announcement increases the total operating funding for education to close to \$200 million for this school year alone.

“We know school divisions are facing financial pressures at this time and this investment will enable schools to continue providing high-quality learning for all Manitoba students,” said Cullen. “This investment today builds on other funding increases to ensure our system is supported, particularly during COVID-19 and as we move forward to implement the recommendations from Manitoba's Commission on K to 12 Education.”

An additional \$63 million was allocated earlier in this school year to support the return to school including:

- \$45 million distributed directly to school divisions and schools for providing additional staffing, addressing learning impacts and enhancing health and safety;
- \$6.8 million for enhanced ventilation projects;
- \$6 million for masks and personal protective equipment;
- \$5 million for the Kindergarten to Grade 8 Remote Learning Support Centre for students who are immunocompromised; and
- \$1 million in additional funding for staff and student mental health supports to address increased needs related to the pandemic.

The minister noted in 2020, the Manitoba government established a \$1.6 billion guarantee for education funding, including investments in school capital to advance the goal of building 20 new schools across Manitoba. The \$1.6 billion commitment is in addition to the Education Property Tax Rebate, which provided tax relief to Manitobans during the pandemic. The rebate provided more than \$245 million to all school taxpayers, about \$400 for an average homeowner, and was funded entirely through provincial general revenue.

For more information on plans for returning to in-class learning, visit <https://manitoba.ca/covid19/schools/>.

- 30 -

For more information:

- Public information, contact Manitoba Government Inquiry: 1-866-626-4862 or 204-945-3744.
- Media requests for general information, contact Communications and Engagement: newsroom@gov.mb.ca.

- Media requests for ministerial comment, contact Communications and Stakeholder Relations: 204-290-5374.