



NEWS RELEASE

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VICTORIA A full return to school for students in kindergarten to Grade 12 will be delayed until Monday, Jan. 10, in order to give public health and B.C. schools additional time to adapt to the impacts of the Omicron variant on communities and schools, and to implement enhanced safety plans to support the continuation of in-class learning.

During this time, schools will be open for limited numbers of students in particular need. Districts will be communicating out to families about how this process will work.

Schools have safety protocols in place that have kept students and staff in school over the past two years, but as the pandemic changes, our protocols must change, too, said Dr. Bonnie Henry, provincial health officer. That's why schools will be implementing enhanced public-health measures to ensure we can continue the in-person learning that is so important for well-being and mental health.

The delayed return is supported by an Order from the Provincial Health Officer, which applies to all public and independent schools in British Columbia. While students will return on Jan. 10, staff will return on Jan. 3 and 4. This will allow schools to implement enhanced safety measures and proactively implement continuity of learning plans.

We know how important it is for students to return to safe, in-person learning, said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Education. This extra time will allow the Ministry of Education and public health to better understand the impact of the Omicron variant on the education system, and school communities to prepare for students returning to class with enhanced safety measures. Safety is our top priority, and we

K-12 public and independent schools must also implement enhanced safety measures, such as:

- g Implement strategies that prevent crowding during class transition times.
- g Hold school gatherings and events (e.g., assemblies, etc.) virtually. If they must be in-person, limit the number of people to no more than 50% operating capacity.
- g Hold staff-only gatherings (e.g., meetings, professional development activities) virtually whenever possible.
- g Limit visitors to those who are supporting activities that directly benefit student learning and well-being (e.g., teacher candidates, immunizers, meal program volunteers, etc.).
- g Pause extracurricular sports tournaments.

The guidelines build on existing protocols that have succeeded in minimizing the spread of the virus in schools, such as:

- g Encouraging everyone who is eligible to get fully vaccinated.
- g Using available space to spread out and to respect personal space.
- g

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