

You've got questions. We'll try to answer them.

This information was updated on Sunday, March 15.
Battle River School Division recognizes that parents have questions and concerns. We also recognize the situation is changing all the time. We'll do our best to keep providing up to date information and answer questions as best we can.



How is COVID-19 spread?

According to Alberta Health Services, COVID-19 is transmitted through person-to-person spread by:

- ◇ larger droplets, like a cough or sneeze;
- ◇ Touching contaminated objects or surfaces, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth. It may survive anywhere from a few hours to a few days on surfaces, depending on the conditions.

COVID-19 is not airborne and cannot spread through the air over long distances or times.

What measures is Alberta using to slow down spread of the virus?

The Chief Medical Officer of Health is recommending:

- ◇ Wash your hands often with soap and water; avoid touching your face.
- ◇ Self isolation of anyone who has symptoms.
- ◇ No travel outside of Canada.
- ◇ Mandatory 14 day self isolation of anyone returning from outside Canada.
- ◇ No gatherings of more than 250 people.

Why are schools staying open? What about after-school care?

The Chief Medical Officer of Health for Alberta says that our province's aggressive measures have helped slow down the virus. So far there is no 'community spread' of the condition in our area. It is safe for our schools to remain open. Those schools that offer after-school care programs for students will continue to have those available.

The belief is that our global response to this virus must be long-term. Shutting schools for a few weeks would not solve the problem. Schools would need to be closed for months, which is not in the best interests of student learning or student mental health.

Did you know that 74% of Alberta children have parents who are away from home every day? If schools were closed where would those children go? They may end up being in locations or settings that are not as well structured, supervised and clean as their school environments.

Is COVID-19 dangerous to children?

According to Alberta Health Services, experts are still learning about COVID-19, so we don't have full information about it yet. There are far fewer cases of the virus reported in children. Most of them caught the infection from someone they lived with or a family member. The virus seems to cause a milder infection in children than in adults or older people, but children with pre-existing health conditions can be adversely affected and children can also spread the virus to others with whom they have contact. In our schools, we are trying to be a bit more careful than usual, so neither children nor adults get sick.

What BRSD events have been cancelled or need to be changed?

- This round of student-led conferences and PTIs are being cancelled.
- Zone and Provincial basketball competitions that were scheduled in BRSD (and other places) have been postponed indefinitely. After school team practices (such as badminton) are cancelled for the time being.
- Mini-slammers tournaments that were scheduled for this weekend and next weekend in BRSD have been cancelled.
- International / National Travel and International Student Recruitment trips have been cancelled.
- School-based events such as ski trips, zoo or museum trips that were scheduled to take place between now and April 30 are being cancelled.
- Presentations and events scheduled between now and the end of April that would require the entire student body to gather together in the gym should be cancelled or modified to ensure the groups are smaller than 250 people in total.
- Groups that use school facilities, such as gyms, classrooms or meeting rooms, will not be permitted to use the school space until further notice.
- Individual classroom volunteers, including parents, will be cancelled until further notice.
- There will be zero tolerance of students or adults who are unwell being at school or work.

These changes are all proactive, preventative measures intended to help reduce the risk of exposure for our students and staff, and keep our schools safe places for learning.

Will we be told if someone is being tested or if they test positive?

Alberta Health Services will stay in contact with the school division. If they feel it is necessary for a school to be aware of someone's specific circumstances, they will let us know. Most of the time, we will not be informed if someone is being tested.

Will a school be closed if someone there tests positive for the virus?

Alberta Health Services has indicated they would not automatically ask us to close a school if a student or staff tests positive for the virus. There would be a public health investigation of the specific circumstances of the person and a decision would be made based on the results.

What factors would lead to the closure of a school?

The Public Health factors that might lead to closure of a specific school would be related to having a number of positive cases in the local area. From the perspective of the school division, factors such as unavailability of staff to supervise or provide adequate educational programming would also be factors.

What if I want to keep my children at home?

Parents always have the right to make decisions they believe to be in the best interests of their children.

Will schools provide course work to students who are away?

The priority for specific programming support will be on high school students, especially those who are preparing for exams. This support can be given through Google Classroom or through email. All teachers can provide information or links to numeracy and literacy resources parents can use to support their child's ongoing learning. They can also suggest home-based activities, such as board games, card games or other activities for families.

What happens to exams and marks if schools get closed?

There has been no discussion on this topic at this time.

Information on talking to children

We know that the current state of the world and the preventive measures we are taking within our school division have raised a sense of insecurity for some children. It's an uncertain time and our responses can go a long way toward helping children continue to feel safe.

We've received a link from one of our information sources to the website for an American organization called the National Association of School Psychologists, which has some helpful information on speaking with children.

[https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource)

In addition, here is advice from three other organizations: the Child Mind Institute, the Centre for Disease Control and Kidshealth, in case they are of help to you.

Be developmentally appropriate. Try to answer children's questions. Do your best to answer honestly and clearly, without volunteering too much detail, as this may be overwhelming. It's okay if you can't answer everything; being available and willing to talk is what matters.

Don't be afraid to discuss the coronavirus. Most children have heard about the virus, so adults shouldn't avoid talking about it. Not talking about something can actually make kids worry *more*. Look at the conversation as an opportunity to convey the facts and set the

emotional tone. According to Janine Domingues, PhD, a child psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, the goal is to help children feel informed and get fact-based information that is likely more reassuring than whatever they're hearing from their friends or on the news. We don't want to alarm students, but we also don't want to pretend this situation is unimportant.

Focus on what you're doing to stay safe. An important way to reassure children is to emphasize the safety precautions that you are taking. Jamie Howard, PhD, a child psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, notes, "Kids feel empowered when they know what to do to keep themselves safe." We don't want to over-react, but we do want to be proactive and careful. We know that the coronavirus is transmitted mostly by coughing and by touching surfaces. Let kids help with the cleaning and disinfecting, so they can have a sense of control.

The Centre for Disease Control recommends thoroughly **washing your hands** as a primary means of staying healthy. So remind children that they are taking care of themselves by washing their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds (or the length of two "Happy Birthday" songs) when they come in from outside, before they eat, and after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the bathroom. If students have seen people on the news wearing face masks, explain that those people are being extra cautious.

(We're being extra cautious, too. Right now, we're trying to do things in a safer way like, for example, by disinfecting door knobs or desks, washing our hands often, coughing into our sleeve and using a water bottle instead of the drinking fountain, so we don't accidentally spread germs. Please remember that having no water fountain does not mean having no water. If students don't have a water bottle from home, school staff will help students get a drink when they need one.)

Remind children that the adults at home and school are there to keep them safe and healthy.

What if I have other questions? Who can I ask?

There is a lot of reliable, accurate information about the coronavirus available on the Alberta Government's website: <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>

There is also good information available on the Government of Canada's Public Health Guidance for Schools site:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/guidance-schools-childcare-programs.html>

If you have questions specific to Battle River School Division, please contact Diane Hutchinson, our BRSD Director of Communications, at dhutchinson@brsd.ab.ca. She will help find an answer for you.