

HIGHLIGHTS OF UPDATES/CHANGES AT ARGYLE PUBLIC SCHOOL REGARDING COVID-19
2021/2022 – updated September 1, 2021

IMPORTANT

Every person (staff member, parent, volunteer, student) entering the school must continue to take the COVID-19 self-assessment found at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>

Anyone experiencing new or worsening symptoms consistent with COVID-19 must not attend school and should seek appropriate medical attention as required, including getting tested at a COVID-19 testing centre.

Staff and students feeling sick should remain at home while waiting for test results. If a symptomatic individual tests positive for COVID-19, they should continue to remain in isolation at home and follow the directions of their local public health unit.

Adapted Environment – Conventional Model with Enhanced Public Health Protocols

Life at South Shore will continue to be different, both physically and operationally, to ensure the safety of our school community. This includes things like posted signs to reinforce self-screening and hand hygiene, directional signage to support distancing and one-way use of hallways and, set entrance and exit practices. Enhanced cleaning protocols will continue, with a focus on high-touch surfaces.

Hand Hygiene

Appropriate hand hygiene is one of the most important protective strategies. We will continue to remind and encourage students about appropriate hand hygiene, including the use of alcohol-based hand rub, and will reinforce its use. There will be several opportunities for staff and students to wash and/or sanitize hands throughout the day.

Masks

Students in Grades 1 to 12 will be required to wear non-medical or cloth masks indoors in school, including in hallways and during classes. Students in Kindergarten will be encouraged but not required to wear masks in indoor spaces. Masks are not required outdoors, and students will be encouraged to maintain appropriate physical distancing with students in other cohorts. Masks are also not required while students are eating or drinking.

The use of non-medical masks for students in grades JK to 12 is required on school vehicles. Students in kindergarten should be directed to wear a mask on school transportation in accordance with directions received from the North Bay-Parry Sound District Health. However, *“Children under the age of five years either by birth age or mental development who refuse to wear a face covering and cannot be persuaded to do so should be exempt from wearing masks”*.

Students are encouraged to bring masks from home, (several so they may change them throughout the day), but if they do not have them, they will be provided at school.

Masking Exemptions

Some students, staff and visitors will be exempt from wearing masks in NNDSB schools, buildings and while riding on school buses. We expect all staff and students to be respectful of those who wear masks and those who cannot wear a mask for medical and other reasons for which an exemption applies.

Students, parents, and staff must expect that there will be individuals in the school, building, or bus who will not be wearing masks because they qualify for an exemption. In such cases, appropriate measures such as face shields, greater physical distancing, clear barriers and/or study carrels, enhanced cleaning, and other infection prevention and control measures will need to be considered. If increased distancing is employed, caution must be exercised so as not to stigmatize the student. The importance of increased distancing may depend upon current epidemiology and vulnerability (e.g., immune issues, etc.) of the staff/student or proximate staff/students.

Accommodations require consideration of the human rights needs of the person requesting an exemption, as well as medical and health and safety needs of others. Protecting students/families and staff who are at high risk for COVID-19 should be considered in relation to assessing the appropriateness and nature of a mask exemption. It is expected that all reasonable steps and considerations will be taken before a student is not permitted to attend school in person, or an employee is not permitted to attend work in person.

The following individuals **may** be exempt from wearing masks:

-Individuals with a medical condition/disability that make it difficult to wear a mask. This can include:

-Medical condition, mental health condition, cognitive condition or disability that prevents wearing a mask OR

-Medical condition that makes it difficult to breathe.

-People who require accommodation in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Principals/Managers should inquire and consider the reasons for the request. For example, is the request being made based on protected grounds of discrimination such as religion or disability? This request may need further assessment by the Principal/Manager that may not be able to be undertaken quickly. In such cases, Principals/managers should consult with their Superintendent first.

If students, staff, and visitors are able to wear masks but choose not to, they do not qualify for a mask exemption and in-person attendance at school or the workplace without a mask will not be allowed.

Exemption Request Process:

Staff, visitors, parents, and students who seek an exemption based on one of the above noted categories must inform the school Principal/Manager as soon as possible of the request and exemption category, so that the request and possible alternative arrangements may be

considered. When dealing with a mask exemption request, Principals should use the NNDSB “Student Exemption of Face Coverings Form” to acknowledge the request and document approval or denial of the request.

For requests for exemption due to inability to breathe: Principals/managers should make reasonable inquiries regarding this request. Are there asthma-related issues? Could a different type of mask be suitable (disposable vs. non disposable, cloth masks or homemade masks)? Although not a substitute for a mask, a face shield may be an option. Face shields provide limited protection but may be better than no mask at all.

Buses

Students are continued to be encouraged to use active transportation to get to school wherever possible.

Prior to boarding the bus, parents/guardians are required to screen their child(ren) for symptoms of COVID-19 at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/> daily and keep students home should they be experiencing any symptoms, seeking appropriate medical attention if required. Parents/guardians should also ensure that students have sanitized their hands and remind them of the need to use good hygiene practices like coughing and sneezing into their elbows. **All students in JK and up are required to wear a mask on the bus.** However, *“Children under the age of five years either by birth age or mental development who refuse to wear a face covering and cannot be persuaded to do so should be exempt from wearing masks”*. Exceptions on the requirement to wear masks may apply, (see Masking Exemptions above).

All student transportation vehicles will continue to have seating plans developed to minimize contact between students, seating students from the same household and/or cohort/class together. The seating plan will be made by the drivers in conjunction with the principal and students are required to always sit in their assigned seats for the purpose of contact tracing.

If a student displays symptoms of COVID-19, the student should be provided with a surgical grade mask and seated alone in the first vacant row, to the right of the driver. The driver may consider moving other students to ensure greater distancing.

School vehicles should follow an enhanced cleaning protocol of disinfecting high-touch surfaces (for example, handrails, seatbacks) at least twice daily.

For more information, visit www.npssts.ca

Screening Procedures

Parents and Guardians are asked to screen their child daily for any symptoms of cold, flu, or other symptoms associated with COVID-19. Staff/students who exhibit signs of illness are asked to stay home. If staff observe a child that is ill, the student will be isolated, and parents/guardians will be called immediately to pick up their child.

Suspected COVID-19 Procedures

Children often exhibit mild or atypical symptoms of COVID-19 or they may be asymptomatic. It is important if a staff or student has symptoms included on Ontario's self-assessment tool that they immediately put on a medical grade mask, isolate in an area as designated, and go home and arrange to be tested for COVID-19.

If a student becomes ill during the school day:

- Immediate student pick-up will be coordinated, and student will go to a designated area in the school (the health room in the office), until parent/guardian arrival (the student will not be permitted to take the bus home)
- Student will be advised to remain home and continue with remote learning if they are well enough to do so
- Cleaning and disinfection of space and items used by the individual will take place
- The school population will be monitored for illness
- Confirmed cases of COVID-19 will be communicated to stakeholders, maintaining the privacy of the individual and family
- The school will follow the direction of the NBPSDHU

Cohorting

Cohorting refers to the practice of keeping students together in a small group throughout their school day, with limited exposure to multiple teachers or a wide variety of classmates. This practice limits the number of other students that a single student is in contact with. This practice will also facilitate contact tracing should that be necessary. Students will remain with their classmates as much as possible, with limited staff contact, where possible.

Recess

Students will not be required to stay in their cohorts during recess but will be encouraged to maintain appropriate physical distancing. Since the risk of transmission of Covid-19 is low outdoors, staff and students will not be required to wear masks outside. The outdoor musical instruments will be available for student use, as will shared play equipment (i.e., soccer balls, basket balls), with appropriate hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

Bathrooms

Bathrooms will be cleaned frequently. Only one student from each class will be allowed in the bathroom at a time, while maintaining appropriate physical distancing. Signage will be posted that indicates the maximum number of people simultaneously using the bathroom at any given point. Individual students will not be prevented from accessing bathrooms as needed.

Water Bottles

All Students will be encouraged to bring their own water labelled water bottles to school each day. Drinking directly from water fountains is not permitted, but students may use fountains to fill their water bottles.

Nutrition Breaks

Students will eat lunch in their own classrooms at their designated spots, with the exception of the Kindergarten class, who will eat at a designated spot in Mr. Brear's classroom. All students will eat for the first half of Nutrition Break, then go outside for the second half. All students will be required to wash hands before eating and upon return from recess. All students will have access to healthy snacks in their classrooms as part of the Student Nutrition Program. Snacks will be in a "grab and go" type format. To maintain the safety of staff and students, Argyle will not be participating in a recycling program this year, so all recycling will need to go home with students.

Inclement Weather Days

School boards are required to develop inclement weather plans and policies which may include pivoting to remote learning. These plans should include an approach for heat days. We will keep you informed as these plans are developed

Shared Items

Shared materials are important for learning (for example, toys for imaginative play in kindergarten, manipulatives for math, computers and other tech materials, books, art supplies, indoor physical education equipment and shared outdoor equipment). The use of shared materials is now permitted. The risk associated with transmission with shared objects is low. The focus should be on regular hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette to reduce the risk of infection related to shared equipment, particularly when regular cleaning of shared objects is not feasible.

Shared Spaces

Shared spaces, (i.e., libraries and gymnasiums) are permitted. Use of lockers/cubbies is permitted. When different cohorts interact in shared indoor spaces, masking and as much distancing as possible should be maintained between cohorts.

Academics

Class composition will have students with different levels of pre-existing knowledge in each class/grade, which has been amplified by months of remote learning. Educators will spend time determining areas of academic need for each student, and they will differentiate the instruction to support each student. Please feel free to reach out to your child's teacher if you have questions/concerns about your child's needs.

EQAO - For the 2021-22 school year, regular EQAO assessments for grades 3 and 6 will resume in the new digital format for math, reading and writing.

Mental Health

Student mental health and well-being is a core element of the re-entry to school plan. It is foundational in ensuring a return to a welcoming environment that supports learning. All staff will be made aware of the potential impact of trauma on student learning, behaviour and relationships. During the initial return to school, staff will be provided with resources from

School Mental Health Ontario that acknowledge and recognize students and their families potentially impacted by the pandemic isolation. For more information, visit: <https://smho-smso.ca/> Please reach out to your child's teacher should you have concerns about your child's mental health and well-being.

Assemblies

Although school assemblies or other student/school gatherings are permitted according to Ministry guidelines, we will postpone gathering in large groups until we are confident that we can keep everyone appropriately distanced and safe. When whole-school gatherings resume, they will follow the relevant provincial requirements under the *Reopening Ontario Act*. This can include multiple cohorts in alignment with provincial capacity limits and includes allowance for in-school student to student peer support programs such as "reading buddies".

Field Trips

In the near future, the NNDSB will authorize field trips for students, but at this time, they are on hold. When this time comes, Day trips and overnight stays will follow the relevant provincial requirements under the *Reopening Ontario Act*.

For day and overnight trips, anyone entering the area must be screened upon arrival and the pick-up/drop-off of students should happen outside of the area or within a designated and isolated area. Students should be cohorted throughout the duration of the trip, with the number of students and staff to a cohort varying based on grouping arrangements.

Keeping daily accurate records of individuals entering the program setting (name, contact information, time of arrival/departure, screening completion) is required to facilitate contact tracing.

Staggering arrival and departure times is recommended to support cohorting and physical distancing measures.

Operating programs in consistent cohorts (with assigned staff members) who stay together is recommended throughout the duration of the program.

Volunteers/Visitors

At this point only "essential visitors" can come into the school. We will follow the direction of our local Health Unit in conjunction with our board with respect to inviting volunteers more freely in the building.

Please note: Any visitors to a school are required to self-screen, provide proof of self-screen (which will be done via the sign-in sheet at the main office), and to wear a medical mask, which will be provided by the school if needed. Finally, all regular volunteers must provide proof of vaccine

In addition to the requirement for visitors to perform daily self-screening, school boards are expected to have a process in place to confirm the daily self-screening of all visitors prior to or upon their arrival at school.

At the advice of the local public health unit, school boards may be asked to restrict visitor access.

School Council

In-person SAC meetings will not take place at this time. Meetings will continue to be held electronically via the Teams platform (more information about this will be sent home at a later date).

Parent Pick-up and Drop-off

All student pick-up and drop-offs before and after school will continue to occur outside the school in the parking lot area. Please avoid entering the schoolyard with your child. If you are picking up or dropping off your child during school hours, please come to the main entrance (in the vestibule) and buzz in. We will receive or send off your child there. When possible, call Ms. Jenn in advance so this transition is smoother.