

# COVID-19: FAQs

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## Emergency protocol

1. **Must each educational institution send an emergency protocol to the Ministère, or is one protocol per school service centre or school board sufficient?**

A single protocol per school service centre or school board is required, but each school is expected to be able to implement the required guidelines and measures in the event of another lockdown to ensure the continuation of learning. However, each private educational institution must establish its own protocol.

## Distancing measures

2. **What about having parents present in school, specifically with regard to acting as Parent liaisons in the context of kindergarten for four-year-olds and participating in activities part of the Passe-Partout program?**

Parents are allowed to be present in class to serve as a Parent liaison in the context of kindergarten for four-year-olds and or to participate in the Passe-Partout program so long as a physical distance between adults (2 metres) and between adults and children (2 metres) from different families can be maintained. The size of the classroom or space must therefore make it possible to observe this distance. Like all visitors, parents must wear a mask while at school (in class, in common areas, when circulating in the building, etc.).

3. **Can annual general assemblies be held in person, or do they have to be carried out remotely?**

It is not compulsory for annual general assemblies to be carried out remotely, though it is recommended. However, schools must be sure to follow the health rules in effect. An up-to-date version of these rules can be found: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/gatherings-events-covid19/#c62731>.

## Wearing a face covering or a mask

4. **[NEW] Reference is made to both “face coverings” and “masks.” What is the difference between the two?**

“Face covering” is used to describe a well-fitted, reusable mask or piece of fabric that covers the nose and mouth.

A “mask” or “medical mask” is used to describe a disposable mask that covers the nose and mouth.

5. **What does personal protective equipment (PPE) consist of?**

PPE consists of a medical masks and protective eyewear. Under no circumstances can a face covering be worn in place of a medical mask when the use of PPE is required.

6. **[MODIFIED] Can educational institutions make wearing a face covering compulsory under conditions that differ from those prescribed by the public health authorities?**

Educational institutions, whether public or private, have no legal authority in matters of public health and cannot force some students to wear a face covering at school or elsewhere if such a recommendation is not issued by the public health authorities.

7. **[MODIFIED] Who is responsible for supplying masks and face coverings?**

Face coverings for students do not fall under free educational services; rather, they are materials for personal use that the student must purchase. However, it has been made clear that medical masks will be provided on an exceptional basis to students who do not have their own face covering.

School service centres and school boards have been encouraged to contact various resources in the community.

The government will pay for medical masks if the situation calls for it. The employer must provide them.

8. **[NEW]** What steps must a student take to ensure they use their face covering safely?

Before putting on their face covering, students must wash or disinfect their hands.

The face covering should be held only by the elastics or strings. When removing their face covering, students should fold it with the insides together and store it in a clean bag. When they go to reuse their face covering, they should avoid touching the outside of it.

To be worn properly, the face covering must fully cover the nose and mouth.

Care must be taken not to touch the inside or outside of the face covering and to never store a used face covering next to a clean face covering.

It is also important that students not wear their face covering inside out or wear one that someone else has already worn.

The *ABCs of Wearing a Face Covering at School* tool will be sent out shortly.

9. **[MODIFIED]** Can parents and visitors enter the school if they wear a face covering or a mask?

Yes. All visitors, including parents, must wear a face covering at all times, except when they are seated to eat or drink. Visitors are not required to wear a face covering when they are seated in a room designated for drama or arts performances and a physical distance of 1.5 metres between spectators is maintained.

10. **[MODIFIED]** Is it necessary to follow physical distancing measures when circulating in the building even if students are wearing a mask?

When circulating in the school, students in Elementary Cycle Three and secondary school as well as school staff must wear a face covering. Nevertheless, physical distancing measures (1 m between students from different groups and 2 m between students and school staff) must be followed as much as possible. One-way circulation within schools, as recommended in the *Back-to-School Plan*, is intended to support the implementation of these measures.

11. **[MODIFIED]** Who is not required to wear a face covering?

Individuals in the following situations are not required to wear a mask or face covering:

- Students in preschool and Elementary Cycles One and Two
- Individuals with a specific medical condition that prevents them from wearing a mask or face covering:
  - individuals who are unable to put it on or take it off by themselves due to a physical disability
  - individuals with a facial deformity
  - individuals who are unable to understand the obligation to wear a mask or face covering or for whom doing so would cause disruption and significant distress, due to a cognitive disorder, intellectual deficiency, autism spectrum disorder, substance abuse problem or severe mental health disorder
  - individuals with a severe skin disorder on their face or ears that has become significantly worse from wearing a mask or face covering

These guidelines also apply to school transportation.

12. **[MODIFIED]** Can a parent who says they have a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a face covering be allowed into a school without wearing one?

Individuals with a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a face covering are not obligated to wear one. However, these individuals should stay home and not go to the school unless absolutely necessary.

13. **[MODIFIED]** Can a student with a medical condition that prevents them from wearing a face covering still attend classes in person or must they learn remotely?

Individuals with a specific medical condition that prevents them from wearing a face covering are not obligated to wear one. For the most part, the children who are exempt from wearing a mask are among those whose teachers are required to wear personal protective equipment (e.g. students with disabilities, social maladjustments or learning difficulties) or for whom the documented risks are lower (e.g. children younger than 10 years old). In all other cases, the children should be made aware of the importance of maintaining a 2-metre physical distance from other people at school (adults and children).

14. **[NEW]** What procedure should be followed if a student (or the parent on the student's behalf) refuses to wear a face covering?

It is the responsibility of educational institutions to take the appropriate steps to ensure that students follow guidelines, just as with any other behaviour deemed harmful to others.

## School materials and disinfection

15. **[MODIFIED]** Can objects and equipment be used, for example, in music and in physical education and health classes? If so, must they be disinfected after each class has used them?

Yes, it is possible to use materials that will be handled by various students. Objects and equipment must be cleaned and disinfected every time they are used by a class group. However, a particular object or piece of equipment that is used by several students, even within the same class group, should be disinfected more often.

As the possibility of transmission through contact with contaminated surfaces remains poorly understood, caution is recommended. The following general guidelines concern the cleaning and disinfecting of spaces where no infected individuals have been. Other guidelines must be followed in the case of infected individuals. Refer to:

<https://www.inspq.gc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/3054-nettoyage-desinfection-surfaces-covid19.pdf> (in French only)

The usual prevention measures (frequent handwashing, observing of respiratory etiquette, etc.) must be followed. Moreover, the most frequently touched surfaces (e.g. objects used in Physical Education and Health class, faucets, toilets, etc.) are more likely to be contaminated, and particular attention should be paid to how frequently and effectively they are cleaned and disinfected. For this reason, these surfaces should be cleaned often, and should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as they are visibly dirty.

The risk of spreading COVID-19 outside through outdoor urban furniture (e.g. park benches, handrails) is thought to be low. Regular cleaning procedures should still be maintained, but disinfection is not usually necessary. Nevertheless, safe, targeted disinfection could be carried out on frequently touched surfaces.

With regard to cleaning activities stemming from indoor and outdoor recreational activities, refer to the guidelines and recommendations established by the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité au travail at:

<https://www.cnesst.gouv.gc.ca/salle-de-presse/covid-19-info-en/Pages/toolkit-sports-outdoor.aspx>

16. Can students in the same class group share objects (ball, jump rope, tablet) and equipment (traverse wall, balance beam, IWB)?

Yes. Regular prevention measures (frequent handwashing, application of respiratory etiquette, etc.) must be followed. Moreover, the most frequently touched surfaces (e.g. objects used in Physical Education and Health class, faucets, toilets) are more likely to be contaminated and particular attention should be paid to how frequently and effectively they are cleaned and disinfected. For this reason, these surfaces should be cleaned often.

It is therefore recommended that shared objects or equipment be disinfected after each class group has used them. Educational institutions may allow the use of objects or equipment that do not need to be handled very much or exchanged among peers. Note, however, that these standards are subject to change in accordance with the recommendations issued by the public health authorities (Quebec.ca).

**17. Must surfaces be cleaned after each class period?**

Yes. As soon as there is a change of groups in a given room, laboratory or workshop, all surfaces and equipment must be cleaned.

**18. Can teachers distribute materials and then collect them for evaluation?**

Yes, within the same class group only, and taking care to limit the number of handlings and to engage in regular handwashing.

**19. Can school materials go back and forth between the school and the home?**

Yes. However, *The ABCs of a Safe Start to the Year* specifically states that students and staff are to bring as few personal items as possible from home.

## Organization of meals and food services

**20. [NEW] Where can meals be eaten?**

In elementary school, depending on the nature of the physical distancing measures established to maintain stable groups, eating meals could either be limited to the classroom or could alternate between the classroom and the usual dining area. In secondary school, priority should be given to scheduling separate, alternating lunchtimes to ensure that the physical distancing measures applicable to stable groups can be followed and also to having students spread out over larger spaces, rather than having them eat only in the cafeteria.

**21. [NEW] Does the rule restricting indoor gatherings to 250 people apply to school cafeterias?**

Yes. The standard of a maximum of 250 people gathered in the same indoor space applies to the inside of schools.

**22. [NEW] Is it possible to have meal services (meal service/canteen) inside the school?**

Yes, but under certain conditions and in compliance with the current hygiene measures. The standards established for restaurants and community organizations specialized in food distribution must also be followed by the persons responsible for cafeterias and by catering services:

<https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/salle-de-presse/covid-19-info-en/Pages/toolkit-restaurant.aspx>

<https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/document-002618/> (in French only)

Additionally, the following elements must be taken into account:

- Service should be provided exclusively by staff on duty wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment (meaning no self-service, so buffet-style catering is to be avoided).
- The mixing of student groups in the cafeteria should be minimized (i.e. students from the same class should eat in the same place).
- It is also possible to work with catering services or community organizations specialized in meal services (e.g. Cantine pour tous), while ensuring that they comply with current hygiene measures.

**23. [NEW] Can students use the equipment available in the cafeteria?**

Yes, but under certain conditions and in compliance with the current hygiene measures. It is important to make parents and students aware that the safest options in the

current circumstances are individual cold lunches or hot lunches in an insulated container. Special attention should also be paid to surfaces that students touch frequently, such as microwaves and vending machines. Other options include:

- temporarily removing access to these appliances and encouraging the use of insulated containers
- assigning a staff member to the microwaves at lunchtime so that only one adult uses them
- ensuring that a staff member disinfects the appliances after each use
- selling alternative items (e.g. school canteen) to limit the handling of food products

**24. [NEW] Is it preferable to package food products individually for distribution to students to minimize the spread of the virus?**

Packaging homemade food (e.g. in plastic wrap) is not a preferred method to limit the spread of the virus. Instead, minimizing the handling of food products and ensuring they are properly washed before distributing them to students is recommended. For example, a breakfast basket could be made with fresh, pre-washed foods. Commercial packaging, while less eco-friendly, does not require these measures.

**25. [NEW] Can cooking activities and gardening with students resume? If so, how?**

Cooking and gardening activities organized for students are permitted. However, it is important to restrict the activities to students from the same class group, ideally, and to encourage physical distancing whenever possible. The usual prevention measures (frequent handwashing, observing of respiratory etiquette, etc.) must be followed. Moreover, the most frequently touched surfaces (e.g. counters, sinks, etc.) are more likely to be contaminated, and particular attention should be paid to how frequently and effectively they are cleaned and disinfected. For this reason, these surfaces should be cleaned often. It is also recommended that as few students as possible use the same kitchen tools.

## School transportation

**26. [MODIFIED] In the case of children living in a joint custody situation, will they be offered school transportation based on both of their addresses?**

It is the responsibility of the school service centres and school boards to organize morning and afternoon school transportation services for students who attend their schools and require this service.

Each school service centre and school board establishes its own eligibility criteria for school transportation, and must do so with the students' health and safety in mind.

Under the guidelines issued by the public health authorities in the context of the current pandemic, educational institutions have had to revise their school transportation eligibility criteria. This includes allowing fewer children aboard each school bus to comply with physical distancing measures.

**27. [NEW] Can more than one student sit on the same bench even though this means not maintaining a distance of 1 metre between students?**

Yes, two students can sit on the same bench. It should be noted that up to three students can share a bench if the students are siblings. Wearing a face covering is strongly recommended for students under age 10 and mandatory for students aged 10 and older in order to ensure their safety. As much as possible, students should sit on the same bench every day.

**28. [NEW] How will the cleaning products purchased by the school service centres, school boards and school transportation providers be reimbursed?**

At the request of the Comptroller of Finance, the Ministère has called on the school service centres and school boards to make a list of any additional expenses directly associated with COVID-19 and informed them of the methods by which the data would be collected. To this end, a monthly report must be produced indicating all additional transportation expenses directly related to COVID-19.

The Ministère will announce the conditions of the reimbursement of COVID-19 expenses once specific guidelines have been determined by the government.

For information purposes, the Ministère de l'Éducation reimbursed the school network over \$66 million in COVID-19 expenses last spring.

**29. [NEW] Are school buses required to have hand sanitizer?**

As mentioned in a letter from the Ministère dated August 12, 2020, hand sanitizer can be made available on school vehicles to promote hand hygiene. In addition to students being encouraged to wash their hands when leaving the house to take the school bus, the use of hand sanitizer is recommended by the public health authorities to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. Given that it is impossible to be completely sure that all students have washed their hands before boarding the school bus, hand sanitizer provides additional protection.

**30. [NEW] Will additional funding be available to ensure proper school transportation?**

At the request of the Comptroller of Finance, the Ministère has called on the school service centres and school boards to make a list of any additional expenses directly associated with COVID-19 and informed them of the methods by which the data would be collected. To this end, a monthly report must be produced indicating all additional transportation expenses directly related to COVID-19.

The Ministère will announce the conditions of the reimbursement of COVID-19 expenses once specific guidelines have been determined by the government.

For information purposes, the Ministère de l'Éducation reimbursed the school network over \$66 million in COVID-19 expenses last spring.

Furthermore, and although efforts in this regard are still in progress, the Minister of Education confirmed this morning his commitment to invest a part of the funds announced by the federal government on improvements to school transportation.

**31. [NEW] If a school bus driver wears both a medical mask and protective eyewear (safety glasses or visor), but their work compartment is not separated by a plexiglass barrier, can students use the benches located directly behind the driver?**

If the only physical barrier is installed behind the driver and the driver is not wearing any personal protective equipment, the benches directly behind them can be used, but the benches less than 2 metres diagonally across from them must be condemned.

If no physical barrier has been installed at all and the driver is not wearing any personal protective equipment, the first two benches on either side are condemned in order to respect the minimum 2-metre physical distance.

However, if the driver wears a medical mask and protective eyewear, the two benches directly behind them do not need to be condemned.

## Physical activity

**32. Are Physical Education and Health teachers required to wear a face covering or personal protective equipment?**

Physical Education and Health teachers are not required to wear a face covering or personal protective equipment while teaching in school sports facilities and maintaining a 2-metre distance from students. However, all elementary and secondary school staff must wear a face covering at all times when circulating outside the classroom.

### 33. How many groups can use the gymnasium at the same time?

While several groups can use the gymnasium at the same time, they must be separate groups. The groups must not come into contact with one another and must remain 1 m apart. To make it possible to maintain this 1-metre distance, it is recommended that the divider curtain be closed or that cones be used to mark the boundary between two groups.

In co-teaching situations, if the gymnasium is too small, prioritize teaching at least one of the groups outdoors.

### 34. Can locker rooms be used?

Yes, locker rooms may be used, but they must be disinfected between groups.

### 35. Must teachers wear a mask when assisting an injured student?

Adults who must temporarily approach a student must wear PPE. Teachers must wear the appropriate protection equipment if the tasks involved require them to be less than 2 m from a student. However, the lack of this equipment should not prevent an individual from helping a student who is injured or in distress.

### 36. Can dance studios be considered a gymnasium?

The *Back-to-School Plan* gives some examples of shared spaces that are used by many groups. It does not provide a complete list, but makes reference to the gymnasium and library, for example. If a school has a dance studio or a fitness room, these spaces can be considered shared spaces. Thus, equipment must be disinfected every time a class group uses it. However, equipment that is used by several students, even within the same class group, should be disinfected more frequently.

## Recess

### 37. [MODIFIED] What guidelines must be followed during recess?

The physical distancing guidelines must be followed, and students will have to remain with their stable class group. Notably, the *2020 Back-to-School Plan* includes modifying the schedule for breaks and recesses to limit contact with other groups.

Objects and equipment used by students should be cleaned and disinfected. Moreover, the Quebec.ca website specifies that a 2-metre physical distance between students and adults must be maintained both indoors and outdoors.

## Laboratories

### 38. Will students be able to do lab work in teams?

Yes, since physical distancing is not required between students in the same class group.

### 39. Will students be required to wear a face covering during lab work?

No. At the secondary level, students are required to wear a face covering when circulating outside the classroom and in common areas and when students from other class groups are present.

### 40. [MODIFIED] Can students on the same team use the same materials during lab work?

Yes, since physical distancing is not required between students in the same class group. However, it is recommended that the number of students using the same instruments be limited as much as possible. Moreover, any materials and equipment must be disinfected after having been used by a class group.

### 41. Can students clean the lab materials themselves after each use?

Yes, provided that they clean and disinfect in compliance with the standards in effect.



## School libraries

### 42. **[NEW]** What measures must be followed in the school library now that it has reopened?

In order to follow the guidance of the public health authorities, the following practices are recommended to ensure the proper use of the school library:

- Students, staff and volunteers are required to wear a face covering when heading to the library, but can remove it once they have arrived. Students should keep their face covering on if there are other class groups there (during breaks, at lunchtime, etc.)
- Whenever possible, have one class at a time use the library and only for checking out and returning books:
  - Use a disinfecting solution to wash hands when entering and exiting the library.
  - Check out the books for the students.
  - When books are returned, leave them in a safe place for 24 hours before putting them back on the shelves.
- Ensure that the space is set up to comply with physical distancing rules, especially in libraries that welcome students during breaks and at lunchtime:
  - Favour furnishings and resources that can be disinfected quickly between groups, such as tables, chairs and computers. Fabric furnishings should be avoided.
  - Space out the work tables, adding signs or markings on the floor, if needed.

## School organization

### 43. Can a new group be created from two subgroups of students from different class groups?

Students must be divided into stable class groups (meaning that the same students always remain together), in compliance with the physical distancing guidelines issued by the public health authorities. It is therefore not possible to form a new group consisting of subgroups of students from different classes.

### 44. If a student must be absent for an extended period (e.g. leg fracture), is home instruction provided (a teacher going to the student's home) as is usually the case in such circumstances?

Yes, these services are still a possibility. Furthermore, the Québec.ca website specifies that any student who must be absent for an extended period of time for medical reasons will have access to distance learning services. A doctor's note is required.

### 45. **[MODIFIED]** What services are available to students who are unable to return to school for an extended period for medical reasons that make them more vulnerable to COVID-19?

It is the responsibility of the school service centres and school boards to organize their services in their students' best interests while making sure to maintain the minimum number of hours of educational services. As outlined in the back-to-school letter to parents, distance education services set up by the school service centres and school boards will be offered to any students who cannot return to school for specific medical reasons. Access to this service will be expanded to include students with a parent or close relative with a specific medical condition residing at the same address, once a doctor's note is provided. These obligations also extend to private educational institutions.

46. **[MODIFIED]** When a student is taken out of class while waiting for instructions from the public health authorities or the results of their COVID-19 test, will their homeroom teacher assign their school work or will it come from a central group of teachers? Will the minimum number of hours apply?

A student who tests positive is not subject to the minimum number of hours of educational services, in the same way that a student with gastroenteritis or illness requiring a short withdrawal from school is not. The student should remain in isolation for 10 days. During this time, they would remain in contact with their class and receive pedagogical services and assignments from the same teachers and professionals as they would have had they been at school.

47. **What about students who need remedial services?**

Consolidation activities and remedial instruction will be provided based on student needs. Accordingly, teachers will be able to plan and carry out consolidation activities and remedial instruction throughout the school year based on these needs.

48. **When will the first communication for the first report card be?**

The first communication is determined locally. It is intended to inform the student's parents of their child's learning and behaviour by means of a written communication other than a report card and is issued no later than October 15. It is the first feedback that parents receive, and can take whatever form the school chooses.

49. **[MODIFIED]** What support will be offered to students in the event of another lockdown?

School service centres and school boards must produce an emergency protocol that complies with ministerial guidelines and allows them to quickly transition to quality distance learning. This protocol must be sent to the Ministère no later than September 15. The minimum number of hours of educational services to be provided by all educational institutions has been determined, and the institutions must plan all the steps to be taken to provide this minimum, including preparing students to use digital tools. The school service centres and school boards must also provide for technical and techno-pedagogical support for students and parents. Regular virtual meetings should also be offered to students.

50. **Is it possible to deviate from the subject-time allocations to facilitate the organization of courses for Secondary IV and V students, especially with regard to Option 2?**

As indicated in the *Back-to-School Plan*, it is preferred that these students attend school in person, full-time and in stable class groups. If Option 1 is not possible, Option 2 allows for students to study from home at certain times during the school week while ensuring they are physically present at school for at least 50% of the time normally required. However, this second option does not in any way allow for deviation from the subject-time allocation provided for in the *Basic school regulation for preschool, elementary and secondary education*.

## Field trips, optional courses and special pedagogical projects

51. **[NEW]** What conditions can be put in place for special pedagogical projects?

Special pedagogical projects (concentrations, passions, profiles, Sport-études, Arts-études, etc.) can resume, and local authorities have the flexibility to reorganize schedules while following the specific public health guidelines. However, for these projects, it is required that students from the same special pedagogical projects be grouped together in the same stable class groups.

52. **[MODIFIED]** With regard to Sport-études programs, can students from different grade levels, and therefore from different class groups, practise their sport together?

These activities must be held within the class group. However, as of September 14, if all goes according to plan and the return to school has little impact on the epidemiological situation, it may be possible to relax the rules to enable schools to reinstitute their usual services. The Sports-études and Arts-études programs, along with interscholastic sports and extracurricular activities that could not be permitted in some schools during the back-to-school period might then be reinstated, thus allowing students to resume the activities they are so passionate about.

53. **Can schools offer educational field trips?**

Field trips such as cultural outings are possible, provided that the current health guidelines are followed.

54. **Is it possible to host organizations to lead activities in the classroom or at school?**

Yes. Visitors and organizations (artists in the schools, guest speakers, etc.) invited to lead activities will be required to wear a face covering at all times, except when they are seated to eat or drink or when they are in a room designated for drama or arts performances and a physical distance of 1.5 m between individuals can be maintained (2 m when in the presence of students).

## Students with disabilities, social maladjustments or learning difficulties

55. **[MODIFIED]** In the case of students who are taken out of school for long periods of time, how can the minimum thresholds for distance learning be met for those with severe autism spectrum disorders or social maladjustments?

By analyzing student needs as part of implementing IEPs, school boards and school service centres are required to evaluate the different interventions that must be implemented to respond to the needs of students who are unable to reach the minimum thresholds for distance learning. Complementary educational services are planned for students who are unable to attend school (for medical or other reasons) to ensure the follow-up and continuation of their learning.

## Daycare services

56. **[MODIFIED]** In daycare services, do the same groups need to be maintained throughout the day (including on pedagogical days and during extracurricular daycare activities)?

For this question, you must refer to page 9 of the *Back-to-School Plan*. In daycare services, whenever possible, students must be kept in their class groups. If this is impossible, stable groups of students and staff members must be organized within the daycare and maintained throughout each day (including pedagogical days). This also applies to activities organized as part of the daycare services.

## Vocational training

57. **Does the minimum number of hours of educational services apply in vocational training?**

The minimum number of hours does not apply in vocational training because this training is based on competency development in preparation for working in a particular occupation. It is a matter of mastering all of the required competencies.

## Adult general education

### 58. **[NEW]** Can individuals aged 70 and older be accepted to study in person at an adult education centre?

Individuals aged 70 and older can be admitted to adult general education.

According to the public health authorities, the risk of complications linked to COVID-19 increases progressively with age and with certain medical conditions. Students aged 70 and older must be informed of the risk.

## Distance learning

### 59. If a student tests positive and is taken out of class, will that student, if their health permits it, be provided with distance learning services?

No. If a student tests positive, they will not be entitled to the minimum number of hours of educational services, just as a student with gastroenteritis or any other illness that requires them to be absent from class for a short time is not entitled to such services. However, during the student's quarantine, they will remain in contact with their regular class and will receive educational services and assignments from the same teachers and professionals as if they were at school.

### 60. Is there a standard form for the doctor's note that a student must present to be eligible for distance learning? What are the standards?

Students with certain conditions that make them more vulnerable to COVID-19 may be exempted from in-person school attendance if they provide a doctor's note. Physicians have been informed by the public health authorities of the conditions that can justify an exemption. Students living in the same household as someone with a medical condition may also be exempted.

### 61. In case of a new lockdown, or for students who cannot return to class, what tools will be provided so they can work?

As stated in the Minister of Education's announcement on June 16 (see <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/salle-de-presse/press-releases/detail/article/le-gouvernement-du-quebec-devoile-son-plan-de-match-pour-la-prochaine-annee-scolaire/> [available in French only]): "In order to be ready for any eventuality, school service centres must be equipped with an emergency protocol before the return to school in the fall. This protocol must allow them to switch rapidly to distance learning should the situation call for it. The protocol must include a plan for the efficient distribution of tablets and laptops to students who will need them, established procedures for using digital platforms to maintain learning and communication, training for staff, students and parents on how to use these tools, and accountability measures for services provided to students."

### 62. A reserve supply of 30 000 digital devices has been announced. How will these devices be made available to school service centres and school boards?

The reserve supply is jointly managed by the Ministère and Ordinateurs pour les écoles du Québec (OPEQ). While the Ministère is responsible for the management process, tracking of inventory and bookkeeping, OPEQ is responsible for receiving and storing equipment, managing inventory, delivering equipment to school service centres and school boards and providing follow up. School service centres and school boards are responsible for configuring the devices and distributing them to students who need them.

An equipment ordering platform is available to school service centres and school boards. Any order made will be sent simultaneously to the Ministère and OPEQ to save time. While the Ministère completes the necessary documentation, OPEQ prepares the order to send to the institution making the order. The school service centre or the school board receives the equipment and confirms reception before configuring the

equipment and distributing it to the designated schools or students.

Remember that students targeted by this program are students who do not have access to digital equipment, do not have exclusive access to digital equipment, are in Secondary IV or V and attending school according to an alternating schedule, are at risk, or are disabled or have social maladjustments or learning difficulties.

The status of requests is tracked by the Ministère to respect the fixed deadlines set for dealing with these requests. The Ministère will ensure that school service centres and school boards are prepared by continuously updating a dashboard with data provided by educational institutions.

**63. [MODIFIED] What type of training will be provided to students and parents to allow them to continue with distance learning?**

The memory aid regarding the creation of an emergency protocol in the event of another lockdown states that school service centres, school boards and educational institutions must provide technical support to staff, students and parents as part of the transition to distance learning. It is also important to make sure that students are prepared to use digital tools.

Parents can refer to the videos in the “Supporting My Child Through Distance Learning” section of the TÉLUQ website and to the information in the Parents section of the Open School platform and on the Alloprof Parents website.

## Labour relations

**64. [MODIFIED] Do specific measures need to be taken for staff moving between schools?**

School service centres and school boards are responsible for the health and safety of all their staff. Therefore, they must implement the health and safety measures recommended in the [Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for the School System](#), produced by the CNEEST. Currently, based on the guidelines issued by the public health authorities, there is no reason that an employee cannot work at multiple locations. In the event of an outbreak in a school, the public health authorities will issue instructions to school staff, including itinerant staff working at that school.

**65. If there is a lack of staff in some schools, can we reassign remedial teachers and education consultants to teaching positions?**

Ministerial Order 2020-008 allows educational institutions to reassign their staff if, when and where they are needed. However, in the current context, these professionals should, whenever possible, be allowed to focus on their primary mandate, supporting the most vulnerable students. If all other alternatives have been exhausted (using the substitute bank, calling on graduating students in teaching programs, etc.), another professional may be assigned a teaching task.

**66. Will the teacher’s workload include spending more time supervising and less time actually teaching?**

The management of staff must comply with the health and safety measures recommended in the [Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for the School System](#) and the teacher’s workload, including the number of hours allotted to teaching. The flexibility that the *Back-to-School Plan* affords teachers to manage their own time applies mainly to aspects other than teaching (complementary tasks, personal work and pedagogical days). It is the responsibility of institutions to provide the maximum amount of flexibility already provided for in the collective agreements. Additionally, supervision and some remedial measures do not necessarily have to be provided by the homeroom teacher. These tasks (homework help, tutoring, mentoring, etc.) can be delegated to other teachers, or where appropriate, to other staff members, depending on local arrangements.

**67. Other than when they are working with students, can teachers carry out their other tasks at home?**

Yes, with the approval of the administration. As much as possible, and provided that team collaboration is not affected, teachers are encouraged to work at home on tasks that do not require direct contact with students.

**68. In the context of back-to-school, can staff be permitted to work overtime and be compensated for it?**

Yes. Staff can be permitted to exceed their normal workload in accordance with the conditions stated in the relevant collective agreements.

Teachers: If, for specific reasons, the school service centre or the school board assigns a teacher a heavier workload with a longer duration than planned, the teacher is entitled to financial compensation equal to 1/1000 of their annual salary.

Professionals: Professionals who work overtime obtain compensatory leave or remuneration paid out for the number of hours worked, at the standard rate.

Support: The collective agreements that cover support staff provide for the possibility of working overtime.

**69. Can staff living in the United States cross the border in order to work?**

Employees in the school system can cross the border in order to work if they do not have any symptoms of COVID-19.

When these employees cross the border, they must answer questions about their health related to the symptoms of COVID-19. If they have no symptoms, they will be permitted to enter Canada in order to work. These employees will not be required to self-isolate when returning home. Border services will provide them with information, including the symptoms to watch for.

**70. How should we respond to employees aged 70 or over who would like to work, despite the exemption criteria issued by the public health authorities?**

Based on the guidelines issued by the public health authorities, the risk of complications linked to COVID-19 increases progressively with age and with certain medical conditions. While scientific knowledge is evolving rapidly, it appears that the risk of complications is significantly higher after the age of 70 years. Employees falling into this category must be informed of the risk.

However, considering that the risk factors can vary and be combined, each situation must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Educational institutions must assess the risk for the worker, the impact on essential services for the public and whether it is possible to ensure that the worker is protected.

**71. [MODIFIED] What exemption rules apply to school staff?**

Even if all of the measures necessary to ensuring an individual's health and safety are implemented, a worker may file a complaint or report a dangerous situation to the CNESST. This complaint will be processed to assess whether the conditions in which the work is performed represent a risk to this worker and whether corrective and control measures must be established. To file a complaint, call the general number of the CNESST at 1-844-838-0808 and select Option 1.

A worker who has one or more health conditions that make them more vulnerable to COVID-19 and that have been recognized by the public health authorities may also exercise their right of refusal, as provided for in section 12 of the *Act respecting occupational health and safety* and under the following conditions:

- He has reasonable grounds to believe that the performance of that work would expose him to danger to his health, safety or physical well-being, or would expose another person to similar danger.

- His refusal to perform the work does not put the life, health, safety or physical well-being of another person in immediate danger.

The conditions in which the work is performed do not fall within the normal conditions for the type of work the worker performs. It is important to note, however, that the assessment of the right of refusal requires that the circumstances specific to each case be analyzed. The following elements are taken into account by the CNESST when analyzing the right of refusal:

- The refusal cannot be founded on conditions foreign to the workplace. For example, the worker's personal condition cannot singlehandedly justify a right of refusal.
- The danger must come from the conditions in which the work is performed. Conditions related to work include the premises, the organization of the space, the equipment and the work methods.
- The existence of a personal condition does not eliminate the possibility of exercising a right of refusal.
- The conditions in which the work is performed combined with a personal condition can justify a refusal to work.

Until a binding decision ordering the worker to resume their work is rendered, the worker exercising their right of refusal is deemed to be at work while exercising this right.

Therefore, even though the public health authorities do not recommend that staff with one or more recognized health conditions that make them vulnerable to COVID-19 return to school, their presence at work is the staff member's personal responsibility. Thus, anyone who is more vulnerable to the virus must nonetheless return to work and, should they deem it appropriate, can exercise a right of refusal, at which time the CNESST will proceed with its usual investigation and render a decision.

The different health conditions that make an individual vulnerable to COVID-19 and that are recognized by the public health authorities are as follows:

- People with one or more of the following chronic conditions:
  - Chronic cardiac or pulmonary issues that are “uncontrolled” or “complicated” and therefore serious enough to require regular medical follow-up or hospital care
  - Diabetes that is “uncontrolled” or “complicated” and therefore serious enough to require regular medical follow-up or hospital care
  - Chronic liver problems (including cirrhosis) and chronic kidney disease that are “complicated” and therefore serious enough to require regular medical follow-up or hospital care
  - Arterial hypertension that is “uncontrolled” or “complicated” and therefore serious enough to require regular medical follow-up or hospital care
  - Significant obesity (for reference: BMI  $\geq$  40)
- A medical condition that reduces the ability to evacuate respiratory secretions or that increases the risk of aspiration (e.g. cognitive impairment, spinal cord injury, seizure disorder, neuromuscular disorder)

This list of conditions that increase the risk of complications from COVID-19 is taken from the interim recommendations published by the INSPQ. Please see the following links, available in French only:

- [https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2967\\_protection\\_travailleurs\\_sante\\_maladies\\_chroniques.pdf](https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2967_protection_travailleurs_sante_maladies_chroniques.pdf)
- <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/publications/2914-protection-travailleurs-immunosupprimees-covid19>

With regard to the age-based criterion, the risk of complication significantly increases after age 70. The guideline from the public health authorities states:

- The risk of complications related to COVID-19 gradually increases with age and for certain medical conditions. Although the scientific knowledge is evolving rapidly, it is clear that the risk of complications is significantly higher after age 70. People in this age group must be informed of the risks.

**72. [MODIFIED] Are pregnant women automatically required to leave the workplace?**

No. See the document entitled *COVID-19: Interim Recommendations on Preventive Workplace Measures for Pregnant and Nursing Workers* (<https://www.inspq.gc.ca/es/node/22326> [fully updated English version coming soon]).

Pregnant women are considered a vulnerable group making it necessary to implement specific preventive measures in their workplace.

Therefore, the INSPQ recommends that the educational institution implement measures for the pregnant worker immediately and for the duration of the pregnancy, regardless of her immunity status, so that:

- a minimum 2-metre physical distance between the worker and her colleagues can be assured
- if work must be carried out within less than 2 metres of other people, an appropriate physical barrier, such as a glass partition, can be installed; personal protective equipment (masks, safety glasses or visors) is not considered a physical barrier

Below are the applicable guidelines and remuneration for school staff, depending on different possible situations in the context of COVID-19.

Justified situations beyond the employee's control	
Reason	Guidelines and remuneration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One or more health conditions that make the employee vulnerable</li> <li>- Aged 70 or over</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyze the possibility of the employee working remotely.</li> <li>- Refer to the question concerning exemptions for school staff.</li> <li>- If working from home is not possible, an employee who is more vulnerable to the virus must return to work and, should they deem it appropriate, can exercise a right of refusal.</li> <li>- An employee who has reasonable grounds to believe that the performance of their work puts their health, safety or physical well-being in danger has the right to refuse to perform that work, as provided for in section 12 of the <i>Act respecting occupational health and safety</i> (AROHs).</li> <li>- The danger must be real and objective and not founded on apprehension. A worry or fear is not sufficient to constitute a danger.</li> <li>- To do this, the worker must call the general number of the CNESST at 1-844-838-0808 and ask to speak to the inspector on duty.</li> <li>- As soon as possible, the CNESST will determine whether a danger exists in accordance with the process provided for in the AROHS, that is, the worker immediately informs their supervisor, their employer or an agent of their employer, and informs, as the case may be, the representative of the union association or the safety representative.</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Able to work and residing with a loved one who has one or more health conditions that make them vulnerable to COVID-19</li> <li>- Able to work but whose presence is required by their child or a family member for health, safety or educational reasons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The health of a loved one residing under the same roof does not constitute an exemption criterion recognized by the public health authorities.</li> <li>- The employee must provide a supporting document certifying the vulnerability of the person concerned.</li> <li>- The employee must demonstrate that they have taken all reasonable measures to ensure that another person can be with the vulnerable person, thereby minimizing the duration of their leave.</li> <li>- Analyze the possibility of the employee working remotely.</li> <li>- If the employee is unable to work full-time, for the time not worked, the employee must first use their leaves for parental and family responsibilities and then the other leaves permitted under their work conditions (e.g. vacations, unpaid leaves). However, sick days may not be used for this purpose and must be reserved for illness.</li> <li>- Their salary is maintained for the time worked, if applicable.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In isolation on the orders of the public health authorities, with or without symptoms</li> <li>- In isolation and identified as having been in contact with a case confirmed by the public health authorities</li> <li>- In isolation on the orders of the employer due to noticeable symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>If the employee is able to work</u>: Whenever possible, encourage them to work remotely.</li> <li>- Their salary is maintained in accordance with the known and agreed-upon schedule in the work contract, for the duration recommended by the public health authorities, whether or not the employee carries out any work.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Waiting for COVID-19 screening test results, with or without symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>If the employee is able to work</u>: Whenever possible, encourage them to work remotely.</li> <li>- Their salary is maintained in accordance with the known and agreed-upon schedule in the work contract, for the duration recommended by the public health authorities, whether or not the employee carries out any work.</li> <li>- If the test results are positive, the employee may be entitled to benefits provided under the <i>Act respecting industrial accidents and occupational diseases</i> (ARIAOD) and to wage loss insurance, depending on whether they became infected with COVID-19 during the course of their employment or contracted the disease under other circumstances.</li> <li>- In case of disability, the employee is presumed to have begun their waiting period, if applicable, while waiting for their results and in isolation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contracted COVID-19 outside of the workplace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The employee must obtain a medical certificate confirming the diagnosis.</li> <li>- The employee may be compensated through the wage loss insurance provided for under their working conditions.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contracted COVID-19 in the workplace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The employee must obtain a medical certificate confirming the diagnosis.</li> <li>- Provided that the eligibility criteria are met, the employee may be entitled to benefits provided under the ARIAOD.</li> </ul>

Other situations	
Reason	Guidelines and remuneration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In isolation after returning from a personal trip, with or without symptoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyze the possibility of the employee working from home.</li> <li>- If the employee is unable to work full-time, for the time not worked, the employee must first use their leaves for parental and family responsibilities and then the other leaves permitted under their work conditions (e.g. vacations, unpaid leaves). However, sick days may not be used for this purpose and must be reserved for illness.</li> <li>- Their salary is maintained for the time worked, if applicable.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Refusal without any valid reason</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Each situation must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis by the employer.</li> <li>- Administrative or disciplinary measures may apply.</li> </ul>

### 73. [NEW] What are the rules concerning in-person working meetings?

The measures proposed by the CNESST in its *Workplace Sanitary Standards Guide for the School System (Preschool, Elementary, Secondary, General Adult Education and Vocational Training) – COVID-19* must be adapted to ensure that activities can resume or continue in the safest, healthiest way possible in the context of COVID-19.

Administrators are asked to review how work is organized to promote the use of the available technological means whenever possible. If meetings are held in person, staff members are required to maintain a minimum physical distance of 2 m between one another.

## English network

### 74. What resources are provided for the English network?

The Ministère will continue to work with its partners in the English network to ensure that improved resources will be available to English-language educational institutions.

## Private educational institutions

For answers to questions regarding the wearing of a mask or face covering, refer to the “Wearing a face covering or a mask” section above.

### 75. What about private educational institutions?

The standards and requirements listed in the *2020 Back-to-School Plan* apply equally and without exception to the network of private educational institutions.

As the Ministère was not a party to the contracts between parents and private educational institutions, it is the responsibility of each institution to discuss with parents and establish methods to respond to the current exceptional circumstances.

In this light, the institution can create a specific service agreement with parents to cover, for example, additional fees related to new service terms and conditions.

However, the terms and conditions established must comply with the relevant public health guidelines.

### 76. Are private educational institutions required to provide distance learning services to students with medical conditions that make them vulnerable?

Yes. Starting in September, in-person attendance at school will once again be compulsory for all students. Students who have a health condition that makes them vulnerable can be exempted from in-person attendance by providing a doctor’s note. Physicians have been informed by the public health authorities of the conditions that may justify an absence from schools. Students living in the same household as someone

with a health condition that makes them vulnerable may also be exempted.

Provision has been made for a minimum number of hours of educational services to be offered through distance learning by school service centres, school boards and private educational institutions for students in elementary and secondary school who have a health condition or who live with someone who has a health condition that puts them at risk for serious complications if they contract COVID-19, should a physician recommend that these students not attend school in person.

Private educational institutions are therefore required to provide distance learning services. The institution may, however, seek a specific service agreement with parents to cover the additional costs associated with new service methods. If such an agreement cannot be reached, the institution must still offer distance learning services, as it is a matter of public health under section 123 of the *Public Health Act*, to protect the health of the population.

**77. Can a private educational institution break a contract to provide educational services by claiming that it is incapable of providing the required services in the case of a second lockdown or a request for exemption from school attendance?**

The institution must take all possible steps to honour the contract. In order to do so, it may seek a specific service agreement with parents to cover the additional costs associated with new service methods.

However, if it proves genuinely impossible for the institution to offer distance learning services due to exceptional circumstances, as a last resort, the contract may be broken. In such a case, the educational institution must, under section 38 of the *Education Act*, inform the school board with jurisdiction over the student's compulsory school attendance of the termination of the contract to provide educational services.

## Preschool education

**78. [NEW] Are staff required to wear a face covering?**

Preschool teachers (kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds) are obligated to wear personal protective equipment in class, since maintaining a physical distance from the students is not required.

**79. [NEW] Can a preschool student wear a face covering?**

Preschool students are not obligated to wear a face covering at school or when using school transportation. However, they are allowed to wear one.

**80. [NEW] Can objects be used within a class group without them having to be disinfected after each use?**

Yes. It is important to remember that play is the preferred method of learning for four- and five-year-olds. Play areas should be maintained as provided for in the different preschool education programs.

As the possibility of transmission through contact with contaminated surfaces remains poorly understood, caution is recommended. The different areas of the classroom (e.g. stations for symbolic play, blocks, puzzles) can be used, but should be cleaned often. Moreover, the most frequently touched surfaces are more likely to be contaminated, and particular attention should be paid to how frequently and effectively they are cleaned and disinfected.

**81. [NEW] Are there specific rules for disinfecting kindergarten classes?**

The rules for disinfecting kindergarten classes are the same rules that apply to all other grade levels.

**82. [NEW] Can students play outside?**

The risk of spreading COVID-19 outside through outdoor urban furniture (e.g. park benches, handrails, play structures) is thought to be low. Regular cleaning procedures

should still be maintained, but disinfection is not usually necessary. Nevertheless, safe, targeted disinfection could be carried out on frequently touched surfaces.