



COVID-19 Pandemic: Return to School Canadian Physical and Health Education **GUIDELINES**

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This is a living document and as the situation continues to evolve and health policy recommendations update, so too will this document. The guidelines that follow represent the current place and time of our circumstances.

Latest update: Tuesday, May 26th, 2020



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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic has seminally changed the way that education systems within Canada function. Now, with schools moving to re-open, we know that it will not simply be a return to learning as it was. According to the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, "the school day will look very different and measures to balance risk of infection with risk of continued confinement will need to be evaluated continually".

The intent of this document highlights Physical and Health Education's (PHE) core subject matter, health and well-being, as a critical learning opportunity for Canada's young people as they heal, re-socialize, and adapt in this new learning environment. Specifically, it assists with decision-making and implementation of PHE and health promoting opportunities during class time and physical activity before, throughout, and after the school day. This document asserts young people's rights to a fulsome and complete education and highlights the critical and unique values PHE offers, activating growth in key aspects of a young person's life - physical (move), cognitive (think), affective (feel), and behavioural (act).

This document has been written with three return-to-school scenarios in mind:

- Schools are open but operating on a blended (at-home and in-school) model that allows for staggered, partial, or otherwise adapted schedules
- Schools are open but with stringent hygiene and physical distancing protocols in place
- Schools are not open and teacher-directed, at-home learning continues

Regardless of the scenario, this document, in stimulating conversations on how the PHE curriculum and health promoting opportunities can be safely and effectively delivered, provides a practical vehicle to equitably support health and well-being during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It recognizes the pedagogical expertise and leadership of PHE educators and provincial and territorial PHE Teacher Associations in finding creative solutions to health and well-being in schools. Finally, it calls on all Educators, Ministries of Education, School System Leaders, and Faculties of Education to value and support quality, wholistic education that has health, well-being and PHE as a priority.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

PHE Canada would like to acknowledge the contribution of the lead practitioners and researchers involved in developing the *COVID-19 Pandemic: Return to School Canadian Physical and Health Education Guidelines*:

Lori Munro-Sigfridson, President, PHE Canada, Active Healthy Living Consultant, Tri-County Regional School Board, NS

Kellie Baker, Health & Physical (K-12) Educator, Health Education Council, NL

Dr. Sylvie Beaudoin, Kino-Québec Research Chair, Associate Professor, Faculté des sciences de l'activité physique, Université de Sherbrooke, QC

Ross Campbell, Health and Physical Education Subject Coordinator, Anglophone West School District, NB

Renee Gregerson, PHE and Athletic Coordinator, Surrey Schools, BC

Jodi Harding-Kuriger, President, Health and Physical Education Council, PhD Candidate, Sessional Instructor University of Alberta, AB

Dr. Louise Humbert, Professor, College of Kinesiology, University of Saskatchewan, SK

Grant McManes, Coordinator of Healthy Living, Louis Riel School Division, MB

Lara Paterson, Physical Activity Specialist, KFL&A Public Health/Limestone District School Board, ON

Maribeth Rogers Neale, Health & Physical Education Curriculum Leader, Department of Education & Lifelong Learning, PE

Dr. Lauren Sulz, PHE Canada Research Council Chair, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, AB

Ted Temertzoglou, Global Health & Physical Education Consultant, ON

In developing the guidelines and suggestions, PHE Canada took into consideration the work of the [Canadian Healthy Schools Alliance](#), [Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario](#), [Children Outdoor and Nature Network](#), [Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability](#), [The Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), [UNESCO Quality Physical Education Policy](#), [The Global Recess Alliance](#), [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), [World Health Organization](#), [Ophea's Healthy School Certification Process](#), [Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres](#) and [UNICEF Canada](#). Without their resources and up to date information, we would not have the necessary tools to create a document such as this.

As well, PHE Canada would like to acknowledge Dr. Megan Harrison from the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Jane Arkell, Dr. Paula Banks, Dr. John Byl, Dr. Douglas Gleddie, Chris Markham, Dr. Lauren McNamara, Steve McGinley, Brian Torrance, Glenn Young, and the PHE Canada Council of Provinces and Territories' PHE Teacher Associations for their contributions and review of this document.

Finally, PHE Canada would like to thank the young students who contributed their voice, ideas, and inspiration to this document. As well, the thousands of PHE educators who go beyond every day to support their students' learning, many of whom we have connected with to influence this document.

Together, we are actively placing students' well-being and healthy development at the heart of education.



HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

Our intention through these Guidelines is to assist with decision making and to strengthen every school's ability to provide meaningful, safe, engaging, quality PHE and health promoting opportunities during class time and physical activity before, throughout, and after the school day.

Please know that this document has **not** been created to replace or override public health or school board policies. It is imperative to continue effective prevention, early detection, and control of COVID-19 in all public spaces.

These Guidelines are rooted in both a [Comprehensive School Health Framework](#) and a strength-based [Trauma Informed Approach](#). As well, they are anchored in UNICEFs' [Framework for Reopening Schools](#), which include four key dimensions to inform planning: safe operations, learning, reaching the most marginalized, and well-being and protection.

Contextualization and adaptation will be critical in responding to local needs and considerations. As education is provincially/territorially managed, please adapt accordingly and include the expertise of local PHE educators and [provincial/territorial PHE Teacher Associations](#) to support health and well-being in schools. As well, harnessing student voice, cultural leaders, and the collective leadership within the school community will be critical as schools work to identify and navigate the gaps in equity that have surfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented stress and difficulty on all Canadians. As a result, young peoples' sense of trust, belonging, and hope have been deeply affected. Moreover, many of our students may have experienced physical and psychological trauma directly due to illness, food insecurity, social isolation, discrimination, anxiety and depression, and loss. With students returning to school, it is vitally important that all young people are welcomed into a safe and supportive learning environment and are equipped, through the PHE curriculum and health promoting opportunities, with the necessary skills to support their own health and well-being during these uncertain and difficult times. Reinforcing these skills will also help them to develop resilience and abilities to deal with future struggles.

The following guidelines help to ensure our focus is on wholistic learning and development for all students:

Focus on Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility: *What considerations need to be in place to ensure PHE is accessible and inclusive for all?*

The meaningful participation of all students, regardless of background, identity, or ability, is essential for optimal instruction and learning. Of equal importance, schools and educators will need to foster a culture of acceptance and belonging for all students. The current global health crisis has caused stress, trauma, and disruption in routine for many students, and these distressing feelings may have been compounded for students requiring additional learning support. The following considerations should be factored into this new learning environment to ensure the equity and inclusion of all students.

- Involve students in decision-making processes. Students are the experts of their own lives and should be encouraged to advocate for their own learning
- Continue to promote autonomy, challenge by choice, decision-making, and problem-solving for all students

- Recognize your diversity. Students' pandemic experiences may have looked and felt different than your own
- Get to know your students' pandemic experiences including home environment, access to basic needs, and emotional well-being. Stress and trauma can inhibit learning, so consider a strength-based [Trauma-Informed Teaching Approach](#) for return to school learning
- Meet students where they are. Connect on a human level, formatively assess movement skills, and have students self-assess cognitive and emotional domains
- Be aware that students may move, think, feel, and act differently now and may need time to relearn skills
- Consider that technology is not available to everyone. Ensure that whatever learnings are to be done online are accessible for all students (e.g. captioning on videos, descriptive videos, readable PDFs)
- Utilize existing supports, such as the [STEP Framework](#), for modifying programming as necessary to ensure students of all abilities can participate meaningfully
- Get creative about ways for students to connect emotionally and build skills like communication, cooperation, teamwork, and responsibility while still following physical distancing guidelines

Focus on Well-being: *How do we support student learning and well-being across the school day?*

- Where services are not available at school, strengthen relationships with community partners and service providers
- Deepen opportunities for outdoor learning, not just for PHE but for all subjects to increase movement
- Utilize physical activity across learning domains by accessing [provincial PHE curriculum documents](#)
- Use a flipped classroom model to encourage a sense of control and shift the focus from direct instructional delivery of information to guiding students' acquisition of knowledge and skills while exploring content together
- Explore Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, such as the [Circle of Courage](#), a model of positive youth development first described in the book *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*, co-authored by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern

- Establish a [Healthy School](#) Action Team to assess needs and assets and drive whole school health promotion programs. Following a process will ensure that work is done in a thoughtful and effective way. It will also lead to a higher level of success and be easier to track progress
- Embed a well-being orientation in lesson and activity planning to cultivate a sense of physical and emotional safety
- Take time to support [Social Emotional Learning](#) through games and activities
- Share necessary facts and information with students and their families/caregivers, but be sure to communicate at an appropriate level to minimize worry and stress

Focus on Trauma Informed Approaches: *How do we support health and well-being and recovery through use of a [trauma informed approach](#)?*

Many students will have experienced trauma as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This trauma can impact learning, behaviour, and relationships at school. [PHE Canada's Teach Resiliency](#) program highlights three core ideas:

- Trauma sensitive schools help students feel safe to learn
- Trauma sensitivity requires a whole-school effort
- Helping traumatized students learn should be a major focus of education

Here are 4 ways to work in a trauma-and-violence-informed way:

- Build trauma awareness and understanding of the high prevalence of trauma and violence, the impact of trauma on a student's development, and the range of strategies that students and their families/caregivers use to cope
- Build safety and trust by creating a welcoming environment, pairing expectations with support, developing positive relationships with students and their families/caregivers, and thinking about safety
- Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection by listening, noticing, and responding with care and a shared vision for identifying services, supports, and care
- Use a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support students

To foster a sense of physical and emotional safety, educators can:

- Focus on the joy of movement rather than compliance
- Set and keep a routine
- Promote self-awareness through feeling charts
- Use mindfulness and breathing exercises to support self-awareness and regulation
- Encourage students to ask questions and self-advocate
- Be culturally responsive, fostering cultural pride and self-pride by weaving cultural knowledge into teaching and learning

To foster a sense of belonging, educators can:

- Increase focus on student voice and agency
- Make time to ask about students' extracurricular interests
- Greet students by name and create safe and upbeat connections – like air high fives
- Help the students feel connected by encouraging circle time, show and tell online, or storytelling
- Embed a sense of responsibility by assigning class management roles

To foster a sense of hope, educators can:

- Encourage students to get fresh air and move when possible
- Explore individual students' talents and strengths
- Give positive affirmation to all students equally
- Encourage students to discuss things that bring them joy
- Foster engagement in school and cultural communities
- Make time for acknowledging gratitude and celebrating success

To foster a sense of mastery, educators can:

- Encourage student ownership of their learning and physical literacy journey
- Give students the chance to share what they've learned or a chance to teach their classmates
- Use evidence-based approaches to learning including [Models-Based Practice](#) & [Fundamental Movement Series](#)
- Highlight each student's contribution to the learning
- Support social emotional learning

*More information on trauma informed approaches can be found on PHE Canada's [Teach Resiliency website](#).

What is a Flipped Classroom?

A flipped classroom refers to a pedagogical approach in which the teacher assigns special interest items, such as videos, audio recordings, worksheets, quizzes, student activity handouts, and/or textbook readings, sequentially throughout the year. Students complete these tasks at home and arrive at school ready to put the knowledge they gained to practical use in a school environment.

As teachers of any subject, our goal is to engage students and promote active learning. The flipped classroom approach is one way in which we can shift the focus in our classes from direct instructional delivery of information to guiding students' acquisition of knowledge and skills while exploring content together. This approach helps us to engage our students in deeper learning and helps them connect what they are learning at school to their personal lives.

Additionally, this approach can succeed in engaging parents/caregivers at home, showing them the potential benefits that PHE can bring to their lives as well. Finally, this approach is a great way to promote the many positive outcomes of your PHE program to families, colleagues, administrators, and society at large.





PHE Instructional Considerations

Physical Education (PE): *How do we engage our students in meaningful learning to help them connect what they are learning at school to their personal lives?*

We are working in, and creating, new learning environments. As such, there are additional factors to consider. In planning for quality PE in your jurisdiction or school, consider the following instructional strategies through an equity, inclusion, and diversity lens:

Blended learning (online and in-school learning)

- Review curricular outcomes and structure your classes around the effective teaching of key expectations
- Re-think delivery models to include flexible, student-centered, blended digital and person-to-person options
- Include student voice, ideas, and perspectives in planning lessons and activities
- Analyze learning outcomes, [keeping the E in Physical Education](#) through a focus on the four domains equally - physical (move), cognitive (think), affective (feel) and behavioural (act)
- Include more individual pursuits than traditional team activities such as dance, alternative environment and land-based activities, exercises without equipment, fitness, mindfulness, gymnastics, and target games
- Explore local parks and green spaces to promote outdoor learning and activity
- Consider using flipped classrooms, inquiry-based learning, social emotional learning, trauma informed approaches to optimize learning and health and well-being

In-school learning

- Respect the physical distance of 2 metres always
- For small sided games, use visual guides to define space and ensure physical

distancing is maintained

- Ensure safe, healthy equipment management
- Incorporate proper hand washing and personal hygiene routines
- If possible, create a hand washing station outside all classrooms
- Use outdoor spaces and parks as much as possible
- Modify layouts and use physical and visual guides, such as tape or ropes on floors, grass or sidewalks, and signs on walls
- Manage and practice movement through spaces
- Clearly communicate the route and rules with students ahead of every location move and transition. Review with students how the move went and how it can be improved
- Stagger scheduling to limit mixing between cohorts
- Close play structures and small communal spaces (e.g. change rooms)

Equipment & Gear: *How do we ensure healthy equipment management? How do we ensure students have suitable gear for PE?*

- Focus on activities that do not use equipment
- If equipment must be used
 - Avoid sharing equipment by numbering and assigning each student their own supplies
 - Assemble individualized PE kits that can be assigned to students
 - Have students [create their own PE kits](#) to use at home or school and set aside budget for additional kits to be purchased
 - Make sure the equipment has been properly disinfected after each use and not touched after disinfection
 - Anticipate equipment hygiene compromises and keep extra equipment on hand so that instructional time is not lost to re-cleaning equipment
- Disinfect teaching aids (clipboards, white boards, pens, plastic bins for transporting materials etc.)
- Encourage students to come to school in clothing that is appropriate for PE and the weather conditions to eliminate the use of change rooms
- When transitioning to/from outside remind, and monitor, students to use designated areas for changing into jackets and winter clothing if moving outdoors, such as in designated desk area or a marked side of the hallway

Space: *Where can PE be taught? If the gymnasium is unavailable for PE, what types of activities can be taught?*

- If using the gymnasium, open the doors to maximize air flow
- Match the instructional design to the available space – use stations, marked off areas, poly spots, etc., to ensure separation among students
- Maximize outdoor time while avoiding use of permanent playground structures, benches, and walls
- Complete an inventory of outdoor spaces (school yard, local parks and green spaces) and designate zones that can be used for PE
- Communicate with families/caregivers at the start of the term to inform them of the areas that will be accessed
- If students are remaining in one location, have PE teachers rotate through to each class during the day and deliver PE in place
- If blended learning has been chosen, consider assigning tasks for at-home completion and then having students apply the knowledge gained in the school setting
- Ensure that whatever learnings are to be done at home or online are accessible for all students

Activities: *What types of activities can be taught?*

Creating opportunities for young people to share their voice can cultivate well-being and a host of social and emotional competencies. Moreover, it allows schools to better understand the needs of students and meet them where they are at. The following ideas were collected from students from across the country ranging in age from 11-18 years and showcase a wide range of movement activities that can be done outside of the gymnasium, either in the classroom or outdoors, and that do not require the sharing of equipment or proximity.



Samples of appropriate activities for grade levels

Grades K - 3

- Follow the leader games
- Zuni and Tewa kick bag
- Play based games
- Movement concepts
- Monkey dance / Siturtaq
- Chalk obstacle courses
- Animal yoga
- Body rock paper scissors
- Jungle runs
- Frogs and fish
- Dance
- Outdoor treasure hunts
- Outdoor survival skills

Grades 4 - 6

- Dance
- Yoga
- Ball mastery
- Meditation
- Taekwondo
- Skiing
- Hoop and arrow games
- Snowshoeing
- Track and field (running and long jump)
- Skipping
- Tai Chi
- Cycling safety and rodeos
- Frisbee golf
- Hiking
- Knot ties

Grades 7 - 12

- Physical theater
- Orienteering
- Geocaching
- Survival skills
- Leadership development
- Fitness from a wellness perspective
- Community support/kindness
- Outdoor education
- Cycling & mountain biking
- Ball mastery
- Juggling
- Track & field
- Singles racket games

- As you plan activities, consider how everyone can be involved and how to modify or adapt the activities to ensure the full inclusion of all.
- Stay tuned this fall for PHE Canada's open access site like the [PHE Home Learning Centre](#) to focus on PE activities and inclusion considerations that take into consideration the instructional strategies included above.

Health Education (HE): *How do we ensure we are responsive to student needs through the health curriculum as a pathway toward creating more effective education?*

The health and well-being of young people requires sustained health education and health promoting opportunities throughout the school day. With the return to school, there is a need for this to be well defined and resourced. In planning for optimizing the role of HE in your jurisdiction, guiding principles should include:

Blended learning (online and in school learning)

- Set specific times for online instruction
- Ensure safe, secure, and trusted connections and platforms for use
- Utilize special interest items such as videos, audio recordings, worksheets, quizzes, student activity handouts, and/or textbook readings sequentially throughout the year in a flipped classroom approach
- Ensure that whatever learnings are to be done online are readable and accessible for all students

In school learning

- Ensure dedicated HE instructional time at the elementary and secondary levels
- Focus on functional health knowledge and identifying key skills that are applicable to all aspects of health literacy
- Increase attention and student voice around harmful behaviours, such as tobacco and substance use, addictions, risk taking activities, illegal activities, truancy, and bullying
- Activate students' sense of control by involving students in active, participatory learning experiences, rather than passive ones
- Keep the E in HE through reflection and critical thinking
- Enhance learning through transdisciplinary opportunities, leadership, and school-wide activities throughout the school day

The following chart highlights areas of the health education curriculum that activate students cognitive (think), affective (feel), and behavioural (act) competence. By using the participatory methods on the right, learning can be optimized.

Focus on skills such as:

- Social and emotional competencies
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Decision-making and critical thinking skills
- Leadership development skills
- Healthy thinking
- Self-regulation and self-management skills
- Cultural competence
- Mental well-being
- Community well-being
- Discussing and analyzing unhealthy coping strategies
- Media literacy
- Food literacy

Use participatory methods such as:

- Learning concepts such as consent and refusal through drama or role play (without practicing unhealthy skills)
- Gathering and using reliable information
- Analyzing beliefs, myths, and misconceptions
- Analyzing advertising and video programming
- Analyzing social media platforms
- Stress reduction through exercise, meditations, and stress management
- Accessing services to support health optimizing behaviours (e.g. school counsellor, community-based services)
- Accessing and joining community programs that support health optimizing behaviours
- Evaluating non-violent solutions

*Go to PHE Canada's open access site to see mental well-being resources and links under [Staff Picks](#)



Health and Well-Being Across the School Day

Recovery Learning and Assessment: *Recovery learning will be critical to well-being. How do we support personalized recovery learning through assessment of, for, and as learning?*

- Use backward design to ensure effective assessment. First select focussed educational goals, then develop a plan based on where, when, and what is being taught. Using the plan, identify what student success will look like and then determine assessment criteria
- Provide students with a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their learnings: providing opportunities for students to choose from a range of activities with similar knowledge and skills
- Use formative assessment to establish where individual students are and be responsive to data you collect from observations, conversations, reflective writing, and/or assignments
- Co-construct learning opportunities, experiences, and goals with students

Maintain Recess: *Students have the right to rest and play. How do we support unstructured play and time away from instructional learning so that students can reap the health and well-being benefits?*

- Include recess for all students every day
- Hold recess outdoors as much as possible
- Consider all the available indoor and outdoor spaces, on school grounds and close by, to provide a range of activity options and minimize crowding
- Involve students in the planning and organizing of recess time, including

discussion about activities, inclusion, social harm, equipment management, fair play, and hygiene practices to stop the spread of COVID-19

- Offer a variety of outside spaces where free choice of different activities can take place, including quiet, creative, and solo activity spaces
- Create and mark 'zones' to reduce the number of students who are in contact with each other and shared equipment
- Provide leadership opportunities for students to help support each other
- Have a list of inclusive games readily available, including those that need no equipment
- *Structured* or *sedentary* activities such as watching movies or activity break videos that do not provide students free choice and peer interactions are **not** substitutes for recess

*More information can be found in the Global Recess Alliance's [Statement on Recess](#)

Active Transportation: *How do we resolve issues related to physical distancing for travel to and from school. How do we increase the number of students walking and cycling to school?*

With need for physical distancing, how students arrive and leave school will be impacted. A ready solution is active school travel. Moreover, it helps students meet the [recommended daily physical activity goals](#), which is linked with optimal health. Knowing that active transportation promotes health and well-being, and students who are active before school are more ready to learn, purposeful planning will be required to realize the opportunities that active travel can offer.

- Promoting active travel to school will be necessary ahead of the school year to resolve the capacity issues we will have with regards to bussing. (see the [School Travel Planning Toolkit](#) here for ideas)
- Once in school, introduce students in PHE to road safety for walking and the ABC's of bike safety, including the fundamental considerations of bike safety, the appreciation of the bike as a vehicle, the knowledge of how to care for both the bike and cycling gear, the understanding of basic traffic concepts and rules, and the development of cycling skills.
- Each morning monitor bike racks to ensure proper physical distancing while locking and unlocking bikes is maintained.
- Consider colour coding the individual rungs of the bike rack to help students spread themselves out and allow the bikes to be locked to school fences to help spread students out.

A photograph of a woman with glasses and a young girl sitting together, with a teal overlay containing text. The woman is on the left, looking down at the girl. The girl is on the right, looking towards the woman. The teal overlay covers the center of the image, with the word 'CONCLUSION' in white, underlined text at the top. Below it are two paragraphs of white text.

CONCLUSION

Returning to school will involve many challenges. One thing we know for certain is it is especially critical now to support the health and well-being of students. PHE offers a vital opportunity to support students learning WHY and HOW to deal with the stress of COVID-19 and take responsibility for, and care of, their health and well-being.

This document is the beginning of a long conversation and learning curve where we all work together to best support students as we develop and determine what school will look like in the coming months and years. We look forward to continuing the conversation with you.



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With respectful acknowledgement that the land where PHE Canada's National Office is located is on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People.