

August 25, 2026

Dear School Administrators, Teachers and Staff:

Re: Updates and Considerations for a Healthy & Safe Return to School – 2026/2027

Welcome back to school! Within this letter, you will find updates on public health programs, services, and resources to support school communities. You can find more information about public health services and resources for schools on the VCH [website](#). Thank you for your continued work to improve the health, safety, and well-being of students and staff.

1. **Communicable disease (CD) guidance for K-12 schools:** Provincial public health guidance to support prevention and mitigation of communicable diseases in school settings can be found on the BCCDC [website](#). In the event of a communicable disease exposure in school (e.g. to a case of measles or pertussis), our central CD nursing team based in Vancouver may call school administrators to gather information on student participation to assess risk of exposure and inform public health actions. This is a confidential risk assessment. Actions undertaken in schools are guided by a Medical Health Officer and can include notifications to exposed students and staff, immunizations in school or community settings, and in rare cases exclusion of students or staff. If you become aware of a potential communicable disease case (such as measles), please contact your school Public Health Nurse (PHN) for confirmation and appropriate next steps.
2. **Routine childhood vaccines:** School-based immunization clinics will run from late September to June for students in Kindergarten, Grades 6 and 9, students who missed previous school clinics, and those new to the school district. The HPV cancer prevention vaccine will also be offered to Grade 12 students who may have missed it previously. Immunizations are primarily provided with parent/guardian consent, although youth consent may be used in secondary schools.

This year, parents will have an opportunity to provide digital e-consent instead of paper consent forms starting in September. School districts will distribute the consent link to parents/guardians and students, particularly for those in Kindergarten, Grade 6, and Grade 9. Paper consent forms will remain available for families unable to use the electronic process.

Thank you for supporting school immunization clinics by collecting immunization return histories and consents, providing suitable clinic space, and ensuring students are available for immunization. We ask that clinic dates be protected from conflicting school activities whenever possible.

Under the Vaccine Status Reporting Regulation, parents and guardians are legally required to report immunization records for school-aged children. This regulation also applies to international students as well as independent and online schools. Please continue forwarding immunization records submitted to schools to the school Public Health Nurses (PHNs). Up-to-date records help ensure students receive recommended immunizations and enable a timely response to outbreaks.

3. **School health promotion resources aligned with Physical Health and Education (PHE) curriculum:**
During the 2026-2027 school year, our Public Health team can offer the following health promotion resources.

- Healthy Sexuality Program for secondary schools: Built to empower teachers with knowledge, skills, and confidence to teach sexual health education. Includes PHN demonstration of grade-based lesson plans and a series of Pro-D workshops on sexual health topics within the PHE curriculum.
- Physical Health Program for elementary schools: Built to support teachers to strengthen teaching physical activity, nutrition, and sleep. Includes PHN demonstration of 4 lessons.
- Mental Wellness resources: Built to help schools to extend existing work in SEL and mental wellness to parents.
- Tobacco & Vapour Reduction resources: Built to support teachers with knowledge, skills and confidence to open a discussion about vaping with students to increase students' understanding of proven harms to support informed decision making.

PHNs meet with school administrators in the fall to discuss individual schools' needs and opportunities. For more information, visit our [VCH Healthy Schools page](#).

4. **SNAP - School Neighbourhood Activation Playbook:** (TransLink, BC Ministry of Transportation & Transit): The SNAP is a new resource to support active school travel for elementary school children in urban, suburban, and rural contexts across BC. It consolidates best practices, strategies, and tools and offers guidance to help make school neighbourhoods safer, healthier, and more active. If you are interested in prioritizing active school travel for this year, please contact your school PHN for support.
5. **Supporting Healthy Eating at School:** Public Health Dietitians are available to provide support in implementing the [School Food Toolkit](#) and [Feeding Futures](#) initiative to expand and create inclusive school food programs for school communities. We can assist you in navigating program implementation, including guidance on healthy, safe, and culturally appropriate food options that meet students' diverse dietary needs. To learn more about how to connect with a Public Health Dietitian, please visit our [Public Health Dietitian Services](#) page.
6. **Vision:** We recommend that all children see an eyecare professional, such as optometrist or ophthalmologist, by Kindergarten entry to start school ready to learn. Pilot vision screening in schools last year found that 1 in 5 students screened required follow-up assessment. Please share this [printable poster](#) with families in your school community by including it in your regular communications with parents and caregivers such as electronic newsletters, parent portals or printed packages that are sent home. Posters in other languages are available through your school PHN.
7. **In-school hearing screening:** Hearing screening for kindergarten students is conducted annually. Public health staff will contact schools directly to schedule hearing screening. Schools can also refer students with specific hearing concerns to their local public health audiology clinics. Information will be provided to each teacher with parent/guardian notices about these services.
8. **Managing medical conditions at school:** Our nurses can support you with training to support students with medical conditions. For *Anaphylaxis*, *Diabetes*, *Seizures*, and *Asthma* please see our [School Health Medical Management online education hub](#). For training for other conditions, please see our [Managing medical conditions in schools](#) page.

9. **Youth Sexual Health Clinics:** We continue to offer youth-only accessible sexual health services in our communities. For more information see our [Sexual Health Clinics](#) page.
10. **Public health inspection of schools:** Environmental Health Officers provide regular school inspections every three years on behalf of the School Medical Officer. The current inspection cycle began in the spring and **continues into fall 2026**. Reports will be provided to all school districts within the calendar year. Inspections support the School District in creating and sustaining healthy schools and focus on public health concerns such as communicable disease prevention, safe drinking water, food safety, and general maintenance and sanitation.
11. **Understanding the health of your school community:** Data on the health of your school population are available through survey sources including CHEQ, EDI MDI, YDI, and AHS available at the [Human Early Learning Partnership](#), [CHART Lab](#) and [McCreary Centre Society](#). Your school PHN is available to assist in using this information to identify health priorities for the school community.
12. **Community health promotion grants:** If your school, school district, parent advisory council, or a student group sponsored by your school is considering a project that aims to address one of your school community's determinants of health and wellness, you may be eligible to apply for one of our one-time-only health promotion grants. Please visit [Health Promotion Grants](#) to learn more about these grants and check back regularly, or sign up for notifications about future calls for grant applications.
13. **Extreme heat and wildfire smoke:** Extreme heat and wildfire smoke events are becoming more frequent and severe as the climate changes. Extreme heat can lead to heat illnesses including dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke – a medical emergency. Wildfire smoke can have both short-term and longer-lasting health impacts, including impacts on asthma in children. For recommendations for schools to prepare for and minimize harms of extreme heat events and wildfire smoke, visit the [VCH environmental health school/childcare resources webpage](#).

If you have any questions about the contents of this letter, the programs and services we offer, or if you wish to discuss any of the attached resources, please contact your school PHN. We thank you for your dedication to ensuring schools are a safe, healthy environment for children and youth to learn and play.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alex Choi".

Alex Choi MD MHSc CCFP FRCPC
School Medical Officer (North Shore)

Appendix: Public Health Programs & Services Available for 2026-2027

School Public Health Nurses

- ✓ Support school staff to safely manage medical conditions at school via medical emergency response training, hands on skills practice (upon request), and consultation on safe school practices.
- ✓ Immunization clinics.
- ✓ Consultation to school staff on communicable disease, general health concerns, and student health concerns.
- ✓ Partner with schools on school health promotion initiatives.

Health Promotion & Public Policy

- ✓ Provides workshops and presentations for school districts, educators, and parents on a range of topics that promote physical and mental wellbeing, including, but not limited to, promoting healthy living without promoting disordered eating, cultivating healthy school food environments, supporting mental wellbeing and resilience, and understanding the health impacts of screen use; additional topics can be explored based on interest and need.
- ✓ For more information, contact the VCH reps from your local healthy schools table, and visit [VCH Healthy Schools](#) for more health promotion resources.

Sexual Health Clinics – Youth-Only Clinic Hours

- ✓ Services for youth include provision of contraception including emergency contraception and IUDs, pregnancy testing and options counselling, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, HIV PrEP, immunizations, harm reduction and referrals.
- ✓ More information, including clinic times for youth-only hours can be found [here](#).

Tobacco & Vapour Reduction Program

- ✓ Provides training for school staff (e.g., Pro-D workshops).
- ✓ Provides education sessions for students and parents.
- ✓ Provides resources and teaching tools/toolkits.
- ✓ For more information, contact smokefree@vch.ca and visit [VCH Youth Vaping](#).

Dental Health

- ✓ Provides dental screening to kindergarten students every 3 years to monitor trends in early childhood dental health and identify children with dental concerns. Provincial dental screening is on hold and currently under review. The most recent public Dental Survey report can be found [here](#).
- ✓ Promotes oral health education and provides preventative services to families.
- ✓ For free or low cost dental services and dental benefits, including the new [Canadian Dental Care Plan](#) for children whose families find dental services a financial barrier, please see [VCH Dental Health](#).

Pediatric Team

- ✓ Provides nursing support services, occupational therapy, and physical therapy consultation services for school-age children with complex medical conditions. Please contact your [local Pediatric Team](#) for occupational therapy and physical therapy services available in your community. Please contact your local Nursing support services [team](#) for nursing support
- ✓ Provides educational in-services for school staff and input into Education Plans and school-based meetings to support inclusion in the school community.

Audiology

- ✓ [Audiology clinics](#) provide hearing assessments, hearing screening programs, counselling, hearing aid fittings, and follow-up services for children from 0 until their 19th birthday.
- ✓ Provide school-based hearing screening for kindergarten students, and full audiology assessment for students that do not pass K hearing screening.
- ✓ Work closely with Hearing Resource Teachers to support students with hearing needs and equipment in the classroom