

SD83 Update



Ministry of Education expands mask-wearing guidelines

To address rising COVID-19 case counts, protect people and communities, and help break the chain of COVID-19 transmission, the provincial health officer amended the provincial public health orders effective midnight March 30, 2021.

One of these changes directly affects public school. The Public Health guidance for schools has been amended to require students in Grade 4 to Grade 12 to wear masks while indoors at school, this includes when they are with their learning group. Also, students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 are strongly encouraged to wear a mask indoors in schools and on school buses – both within and outside of their learning group – though mask wearing ultimately remains a personal or family/caregiver choice for these students, and their choices must be respected.

“Rising case levels, variants of concern, increased transmission and an increase in more severe cases are huge concerns,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health when announcing the changes. “B.C. public health officials are making the tough choices now to break the chain and protect our communities.”

[The Ministry of Education shared these new guidelines last night \(March 30th\)](#)

SD83 Superintendent of Schools CEO Peter Jory reports that in response to these changes, SD83 is redistributing its existing inventory and has rush-ordered 6,000 of the smaller re-useable masks for our younger students. He added that as soon as schools are adequately resourced the new safety protocols will be put into place.

“Some students may have masks that they are able to bring from home and may be wearing them already. But, some students may not. Principals and teachers will be implementing the changes as soon as there are enough masks for all of their students.”

Exceptions include:

- A person who is unable to wear a mask because they do not tolerate it (for health or behavioural reasons);
- A person unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person;
- If the mask is removed temporarily for the purposes of identifying the person wearing it;
- If the mask is removed temporarily to engage in an educational activity that cannot be performed while wearing a mask (e.g. actively playing a wind instrument, high-intensity physical activity, etc.);
- If a person is eating or drinking;
- If a person is behind a barrier;
- While providing a service to a person with a disability or diverse ability (including but not limited to a hearing impairment), where visual cues, facial expressions and/or lip reading/movements are important.

If you have any questions about the new safety protocols please contact your school principal.