



COVID-19 UPDATE: DEALING WITH RETURN TO SCHOOL AND OTHER IMPACTS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Webinar recording: **Sep 15, 2020**

Video archive URL: <https://ubccpd.ca/covid19/archive>

Presentation Slides (if applicable): <https://ubccpd.ca/covid19/archive>

Disclaimer: Information on COVID-19 is changing rapidly and much of the research is preliminary. Assessment and management protocols are suggestions only; they do not take the place of clinical judgement. Please check with your own health authorities and local medical health officers as policies and support for the suggested approaches to patient care may vary between regions.

This summary was prepared by Dr. Simon Moore and not by the speakers.

Webinar Summary

Objectives & Skills Gained

As a result of participating in this webinar, participants will:

- Identify the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 on children and youth
- Address mental health and substance use impacts in children and youth in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Discuss return to school concerns with children/youth, parents and teachers

Summary of Clinical Pearls

- **Tips for addressing student, parent, or teacher anxiety about COVID-19**
 - Ask how students, teachers, or parents are doing.

- Anxieties are driven by fear centres in the brain and less so by logic, so beginning the conversation with facts countering their fears may not be helpful.
 - Instead, initially validating fears can help lower anxiety and improve the ability to subsequently receive facts.
 - When people stay in situations that cause anxiety, the anxiety tends to get better over time, rather than worse.
 - Large amounts of news intake, especially from unreliable sources, can increase anxiety.
 - A lot of anxiety management is in the relationship and sharing that they are not alone.
 - Suggest that patients make pacts with their co-workers to remain positive about the situation and focus on things they can control, rather than focusing on the negatives.
 - Even with large amounts of stress, children do well when there are caring relationships around them; encourage families to spread the contagion of care.
 - SSRIs for students and teachers can lower anxiety but should be done in conjunction with the above and with stepwise exposure.
- **Options for COVID-19 related counseling (including low-cost or free) are being increased**
 - See resources below for free counselling & virtual groups for youth, parents, or caregivers
- **Tips for parents for successful school return**
 - Make an informed decision; “live” and practice your decision; communicate confidence to your child; practice the routines in advance with your child and break down the steps if refusal.
 - If child pushes back:
 - Don’t give up
 - Go through the decision framework above
 - Check on parents’ ambivalence
 - Make home extremely boring during school hours (e.g. No Wi-Fi)
 - Parents role-playing social interactions can help children prepare for stressful situations.
 - Encourage children to find a like-minded friend in their group; even one friend can make going to school much more enjoyable.
 - Focus on the positive aspects of going to school; students may be surprised at how positive of an experience it can be even during COVID-19.
 - Many schools are looking at how to support the transition back, and are considering options beyond just going back vs. not going back; there is room for flexibility.
- **After-school activities will be available, but will look different**
 - Parents will have to decide what activities are right for each student at that time.

- Measures will be put in place to reduce COVID-19 risk, and risk reduction plans from each individual sporting association are being reviewed by the BCCDC. Over 35 different sports already have listed COVID-19 guidelines.
- **Guidelines for symptomatic students to return to school have been recently updated by BCCDC**
 - These replace guidelines previously released by the Ministry of Education. The new guidelines have helpful flowcharts to determine who should stay home from school and/or be tested.
 - Students with COVID-19 symptoms, who are close contacts of positive COVID-19 cases, or who have travelled internationally in the last 14 days should not go to school.
 - Not everyone with COVID-19 has a fever, so temperature screening is not considered as effective as symptom screening.
 - Fever, chills, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and loss of smell or taste are the most concerning symptoms. If these develop the student should go home and wait for 24 hours. If the symptoms don't worsen over 24 hours, or resolve, they can go back to school without testing.
 - Note that runny nose is not a part of the typical symptoms as it may be usual for the child or due to allergy. However, if it occurs in conjunction with other symptoms like fever, lasts for over 24 hours, or is atypical for the child, then testing should be considered.
 - If the student has symptoms and gets a COVID-19 test which is negative, and they are feeling well enough to return to school, they can go back.
 - If the family does not want to have a test, the child has to stay home for 10 days as though they do have COVID-19.
 - If unsure, contact MHO and/or err on the side of testing.
- **Virtual learning for students with underlying medical conditions and immune suppression should be considered on a case-by-case basis.**
 - If a child was safe to go to school during influenza, it is likely safe for them to go to school now.
- **Schools have been assessed by Public Health as being low risk for COVID-19.**
 - Addition of the Learning Group structure allows for another layer of isolation without having to isolate an entire school after an exposure.
 - It is unlikely that an entire school will have to shut down. Public Health is currently not expecting any deaths from students due to school exposure, and potentially no hospitalizations either.

- Children are impacted much less by the virus, and children (especially those less than 10 years of age) are experiencing milder symptoms and less severe illnesses than adults. Children are much more likely to get the SARS-CoV-2 virus from adults rather than give it to adults, which is unusual compared to other viruses.
 - Isolation is recommended only for positive cases, and close contacts of cases. Public health will always contact individuals who have to isolate.
 - Public health has a good relationship with schools and is experienced with isolating individual classes for other disease exposures (e.g. measles)
 - Widely notifying in instances of positive cases can violate the individual's confidentiality, so notification is done in a manner to protect the person's privacy.
- **New options for COVID-19 testing are being trialed to help children tolerate the test**
 - These include saliva sample (being studied) and gargle sample (already in use at BC Children's Hospital and some testing sites).
 - As they are less invasive than the nasopharyngeal swab, these tests will hopefully increase the number of children and individuals willing to be tested.
- **Testing capacity has been dramatically increased**
 - New testing sites are open, and drive-through testing sites can now test children over 4. UPCCs can test patients of any age.
 - There are no plans to send nurses to test at schools at this time as case numbers are currently too low for this strategy.
- **Back-to-school restart plan is currently at Stage 2 and there are plans in place should the situation worsen**
 - **Stage 1:** Learning as usual full-time in class
 - **Stage 2:** Learning groups: Full time in class ← *We are here*
 - **Stage 3:** In-class & remote learning
 - **Stage 4:** Remote learning with exceptions
 - **Stage 5:** Remote learning for all

Resources

[Foundry Resources \(Main Website\)](#)

[How to access virtual support across BC](#)

[How to access virtual support for anxiety](#)

[How to access virtual support for substance use](#)

[Resources for youth](#)

[Resources for family/caregivers](#)

[BC CPD Return to School Webinar Archive](#)

[BCCDC Resources](#)

[CYMHSU Information for Parents About Return to School During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Thanks to the speakers on the video:

- **Panelist:** Dr. Ashley Miller, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist
- **Panelist:** Dr. Hayley Broker, Family Physician
- **Panelist:** Mr. Jeremy Church, School District Administrator
- **Panelist:** Dr. Linda Uyeda, Family Physician
- **Panelist:** Dr. Mark Lysyshyn, Deputy Chief Medical Health Officer
- **Panelist:** Dr. Rosalind Catchpole, Head of the Mood and Anxiety Disorders Clinic at BCCH
- **Panelist:** Dr. Wilma Arruda, Pediatrician
- **Moderator:** Dr. Matt Chow, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist