

August 19, 2024

Dear School Administrators, Teachers and Staff:

Re: Updates and Considerations for a Healthy & Safe Return to School – 2024/2025

Welcome back to school! Within this annual letter you can find updates on public health programs, services and resources to support school communities. Thank you for your continued work to improve the health, safety and well-being of students and staff.

- 1. Communicable disease guidance for K-12 schools:** Provincial public health guidance to support prevention and mitigation of communicable disease in school settings is located at this web [location](#).
- 2. Routine childhood vaccines:** School-based immunization clinics for students start in late September and continue until next June. This year, immunizations will be offered to students in grades K, 6, 9, those who missed immunization clinics at school last year, and students new to the school district. We thank you for providing our staff with an appropriate space and plenty of time for their clinics so that students can be immunized safely. Immunizations are primarily offered to students based on parental consent; youth consent can also be used in secondary schools.

As of July 1, 2019, parents and guardians are legally required to report immunization records of school age children. The [Vaccine Status Reporting Regulation](#) also applies to international students. We request that you update your district or school enrolment information to indicate that immunization records are required for all students. While schools are not expected to actively collect missing immunization histories, it is important that parents receive consistent information from schools and local public health. Please take this opportunity to review your processes for forwarding immunization histories submitted to schools to the school PHN. Up-to-date immunization records enable us to provide the best care, recommend missed immunizations to students, and respond quickly to outbreaks.

- 3. School Health Promotion:** We continue to re-start and refresh our school health promotion program in partnership with schools and districts. Our **physical health promotion program**, aimed at supporting elementary school teachers to improve physical activity, nutrition, and sleep in students, is currently available. Our new **healthy sexuality program**, aimed at supporting secondary school teachers to gain the knowledge and skills needed to deliver the comprehensive sexual health components of the Physical and Health Education Curriculum, will be available this winter. Public Health Nurses will meet with your School in the fall to discuss your needs and opportunities. In the coming years, we will also develop health promotion tools and resources for substance use (including vaping), and mental wellness (including school connectedness). For ideas and resources for promoting school health, visit our [VCH School Health webpage](#).
- 4. School Food Programming:** Public Health Dietitians are available to provide ongoing support in implementing the [Feeding Futures](#) funding to expand and create effective and inclusive school food programs that benefit the entire school community. We can assist you in navigating the logistical components of program implementation, including advising on healthy, safe and culturally appropriate food options that meet the nutritional needs of students with diverse dietary considerations. To learn more about how to connect with your local Public Health Dietitian, please visit our [Public Health Dietician Services](#) Page.
- 5. Management of medical conditions at school:** 2 years ago, we launched our new [School Health Medical Management online education hub](#) with online courses for Anaphylaxis, Type 1 Diabetes, Seizures, and Asthma. These courses enable school staff to gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to support students managing these medical conditions at school. Your Public Health Nurse can support school staff to access the courses, answer questions, and, if requested, provide hands-on skills practice at your school. Please see [Appendix B](#) for a poster to support school communication about the education hub.

6. **Vision:** We continue to promote vision health in children. We recommend that all children see an optometrist by Kindergarten entry, to start school ready to learn. Optometrist services can be found on the [BC Doctors of Optometry webpage](#). Please refer to [vch.ca](#) for more information about vision health and community supports. 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 are also available in Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Farsi, Punjabi, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Please connect with your school's Public Health Nurse if you wish to receive these versions.
7. **In-school screening services:** 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. A package will be provided to each teacher with parent/guardian notices about these services.
8. **Understanding the health of your school population:** The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP, UBC) develops a newsletter for school districts that highlights new resources and Child Development Monitoring System data (CHEQ, EDI, MDI, YDI) available to support schools with strategic and action planning. Reports and newsletters can be found at <https://help.earlylearning.ubc.ca/summer-2024-school-district-newsletter>

All school districts in VCH have received district level data and resources from McCreary Centre Society for the 2023 BC Adolescent Health Survey. Provincial resources, presentations and workshops for youth and adult audiences, and Youth Action Grants are also available. Regional reports for Richmond, Vancouver and North Shore/Coast Garibaldi HSDAs will be published within the coming weeks. For more details, please visit [mcs.bc.ca](#) or email mccreary@mcs.bc.ca.
9. **Community Health Promotion Grants:** If your school, school district, parent advisory council, or a student group sponsored by your school is considering a one-time-only project that aims to address an upstream determinant of health and wellness of your students and/or school community, you may be eligible to apply for one of our one-time-only health promotion small grant programs. Please visit www.vch.ca/grants to learn more about VCH's health promotion project grants, and check back regularly or sign up for notifications about future calls for grant applications.
10. **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. The small particles in wildfire smoke, also known as fine particulate matter (PM2.5), can travel deep into the lungs when breathed in and cause inflammation throughout the body. This can have both short-term and longer-lasting health impacts. Children, infants and people with certain chronic health conditions are particularly susceptible to the health effects of extreme heat and wildfire smoke. For guidance and recommendations for schools to prepare for and minimize harms of extreme heat events and wildfire smoke, visit the [VCH Public Health resources webpage](#).
11. **Changes to Youth Clinics:** We have expanded our sexual health services to include all-ages in our communities. Each community will continue to maintain youth-only clinic hours. For more information see our [Sexual Health Services](#) page.

If you have any questions about the content of this letter, the programs and services we offer, or if you wish to discuss any of the resources linked herein, please contact your local school public health nurse.

Yours sincerely,

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Meena Dawar MD MHSc FRCPC
School Medical Officer (Richmond)

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Appendix A: Public Health Programs & Services Available for 2024-2025

Public Health Nursing

- ✓ Support school staff to gain knowledge and skill in medical management of emergency health conditions via online education, answering questions, and, if requested, providing hands-on skills practice.
- ✓ Immunization clinics
- ✓ Consultation and guidance regarding communicable disease prevention and general health concerns.
- ✓ Individual student health assessments as requested by, and in consultation with, school staff.
- ✓ In collaboration with schools, identify, plan, carry out and/or support school health promotion initiatives.

Health Promotion

- ✓ PHNs, Public Health Dietitians and Community Health Specialists can collaborate with schools and school districts to support school health promotion initiatives to best meet your school & school district needs using the [Comprehensive School Health Framework](#).
- ✓ See our [School Health webpage](#) for school resources to help take action on child and youth health.
- ✓ Dietitians and Community Health Specialists provide district-level support, including workshops to enhance staff knowledge and skills in student nutrition and physical health promotion. For more information, please contact your School District leads and visit [Supporting Healthy Eating at School](#).

Sexual Health Clinics – Youth-Only Clinic Hours

- ✓ Services for youth include provision of contraception including emergency contraception, 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

- ✓ Trains educators (e.g., Professional Development Day education)
- ✓ Provides education sessions for students and parents
- ✓ Provides resources and teaching tools
- ✓ For more information, contact smokefree@vch.ca and visit [here](#)

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. The next screening will be in 2025/2026. 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 services available in your community.
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Provides 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.

Appendix B: VCH School Health Medical Management Online Education Hub

The graphic features a light blue background with various colorful shapes like circles, wavy lines, and a pencil. At the top left is the 'School Health Medical Management' logo, which consists of four colored squares (green, orange, pink, blue) arranged in a 2x2 grid. Below the logo, the text 'School Health Medical Management' is written in a dark purple font. In the center, a white rounded rectangle contains the text 'Educational Website' and the URL 'schoolhealth.vchlearn.ca'. Below this, it states '4 courses available for all school staff to support students with the following medical conditions:'. At the bottom of the white rectangle are four colored tabs: pink for 'Anaphylaxis', light blue for 'Diabetes', dark purple for 'Asthma', and dark green for 'Seizures'. At the bottom center, a large red apple outline contains a QR code with a small 'b' logo in the center. A pencil is shown at the bottom right, drawing a wavy line on a surface.

School Health Medical Management

Educational Website
schoolhealth.vchlearn.ca

4 courses available for all school staff to support students with the following medical conditions:

- Anaphylaxis
- Diabetes
- Asthma
- Seizures

Appendix C: Additional Resources

Data Sources

The following data sources provide information about your schools and district. Please consider reviewing these sources to inform your programs:

- [BC COVID-19 Survey on Population, Action and Knowledge \(SPEAK\)](#) – the results look at risk perception and the broader impacts of COVID-19 which include social, economic, physical health, mental wellness and community resiliency.
- [Middle Years Development Instrument \(MDI\)](#) - sheds light on the thoughts, feelings and experiences of children in grade 4 to grade 8. This data can be used to inform policy and practice in your school community.
- [Adolescent Health Survey](#) - provides an evidence base of health behavior trends, emerging issues, and risk and protective factors for healthy development.
- [Youth Development Instrument \(YDI\)](#) - schools can use their data reports to identify and address issues amongst youth and to promote positive youth development. This is particularly important given recent YDI data indicating the pandemic's continued impact on youths' well-being, especially mental wellness. You can find examples of YDI reports for 22 participating districts from previous years [here](#).

