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PALS Communicable Disease Prevention Plan

Updated September 20, 2023

INTRODUCTION

PALS Autism School continues to build on the experiences and the advice of public health experts to determine our communicable disease prevention plan. The PALS Communicable Disease Prevention Plan focuses on reducing the risk of transmission of communicable diseases, including COVID-19.

This document was created/updated based on:

- [Provincial Communicable Disease Guidelines for K-12 School Settings](#) (September 2023)
- [BC Centre for Disease Control | Ministry of Health Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) (September 13, 2023)
- [Supporting Child Wellness: Public Health Guidance for Communicable Disease \(including COVID-19\) Management in Child Care Settings](#) (September 13, 2023)

NOTE: Much of the following document includes direct quotes from one or more of the above links.

Staff, parents, and school visitors are to review this document and follow these operational guidelines when onsite at PALS in order to ensure the health & safety of self and others; everyone must do their part to help reduce the spread of communicable diseases.

1. PREVENTION MANAGEMENT

The following principles are applied to communicable disease prevention and management at PALS:

- Aligning communicable disease prevention measures with public health guidance to support student and staff wellness.
- Using an inclusive and trauma-informed lens, with a focus on mental health and wellness.
- Focusing supports to address unique student and staff needs, recognizing the different impacts that communicable diseases may have on individuals.
- Engaging and collaborating with parents/caregivers, staff, and community partners to develop local solutions when needed.
- As required by WorkSafeBC, PALS will ensure the health of their staff by ensuring steps are taken to reduce the risk to staff from communicable diseases.

- The Provincial Health Officer or local Medical Health Officers may issue temporary provincial, regional or local recommendations or orders of additional prevention measures during times of increased communicable disease risk.

2. COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREVENTION GUIDANCE

SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

PALS will be a supportive environment for communicable disease prevention by:

- Having staff model personal practices (e.g., hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette), and assist students as needed.
- Sharing reliable information, including from the BC Centre for Disease Control, Office of the Provincial Health Officer, and local health authorities and First Nations Health Authority to parents, families and caregivers.
- Promoting personal practices in the school (e.g., posters).
- Ensuring individual choices for personal practices (e.g., choosing to wear a mask or face covering) are supported and treated with respect, recognizing varying personal comfort levels.

VACCINES

BCCDC Guidance

Vaccines are important tools to protect against serious outcomes of many communicable diseases, such as COVID and influenza. Students and staff are encouraged to ensure they are up to date [on all recommended vaccines for communicable diseases](#), according to PALS Student and Staff Immunization policies.

PALS will share evidence-based information and promote opportunities to be vaccinated in partnership with public health and the local medical health officer. For administrators and staff, more information on vaccination and communicable disease prevention in the workplace is available in the [Work Safe B.C. website](#). Evidence-based immunization information and tools for B.C. Residents are available from [BCCDC](#) and [ImmunizeBC](#) websites.

As required by the [Support Services for Schools Order](#) and the [Inter-Ministerial Protocols for the Provision of Support Services to Schools](#), PALS will provide a designated space for public health nurses or other qualified health personnel to carry out their duties (including immunizations).

WORKSAFEBC – COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREVENTION

PALS follows WorkSafeBC guidance and provides communication, training, and orientation to ensure the health and safety of its staff. WorkSafeBC communicable disease prevention guidance is aligned with the guidance provided by BCCDC.

3. COMMUNICABLE DISEASE PREVENTION PLANS

Communicable disease prevention plans focus on reducing the risk of transmission of communicable diseases. This plan is readily available on the school website, and in common staff areas of the school.

The prevention measures outlined below should always be in place. During times of increased communicable disease risk, public health may recommend additional prevention measures for PALS to implement.

The PALS Communicable Disease Prevention Plans will be updated when temporary additional measures are in place, as well as when the guidelines are updated, and on an annual basis with the PALS Health and Safety Committee.

EMERGENCY AND EVACUATION DRILLS

Emergency and evacuation planning, and drills will consider the communicable disease prevention plan. In the event of an actual emergency, communicable disease prevention measures can be suspended to ensure for a timely, efficient, and safe response.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES

CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

BCCDC Guidance

Regular cleaning and disinfection can help prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Cleaning of frequently touched surfaces will occur in line with regular practices and when visibly dirty.

As part of sustainable communicable disease management, PALS will maintain and incorporate enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices, whenever feasible.

- General Cleaning
 - Regular practices will include general cleaning of the premises.

- Products and Procedures
 - For **cleaning**, use water and detergent (e.g., liquid dishwashing soap), or common, commercially available products, along with good cleaning practices. For hard-to-reach areas, use a brush and rinse thoroughly prior to disinfecting.
 - For **disinfection**, use common, commercially available disinfectants. [Health Canada](#) provides information about products with evidence for use against specific communicable diseases that may be useful in selecting products.
 - Follow these procedures when cleaning and disinfecting:
 - Always wash hands before and after handling shared objects.
 - Items and surfaces that a person has placed in their mouths or that have been in contact with bodily fluids should be cleaned as soon as possible and between uses by different people.
 - A dishwasher can be used to clean and sanitize dishwasher-safe items if the sanitize setting is used with adequately hot water. Regular practices should include general cleaning of the premises.
- Frequently Touched Surfaces and Shared Use Items
 - Cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces should occur at least once in a 24-hour period and when visibly dirty.
 - Frequently touched surfaces are items touched by larger numbers of students and staff. They can include doorknobs, light switches, hand railings, water fountains and toilet handles, as well as shared equipment (e.g., computer keyboards, PE/sports and music equipment), appliances (e.g., microwaves) and service counters (e.g., prep areas), and may change from day to day based on utilization.
 - Frequently touched items like toys or manipulatives that may not be able to be cleaned often (e.g., fabrics) or at all (e.g., sand, foam, playdough, etc.) can be used. Carpets and rugs can also be used.
 - Proper hand hygiene should be practiced before and after shared equipment use. Equipment that touches the mouth (e.g., instrument mouth pieces, water bottles, utensils) or has been in contact with bodily fluids should not be shared unless cleaned and disinfected in between uses.

Cleaning and disinfection activities should focus on spaces that have been utilized by staff or students.

- Cleaning and Disinfecting Bodily Fluids
 - Follow these procedures when cleaning and disinfecting bodily fluids (e.g., runny nose, vomit, stool, urine):
 - Wear disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids.
 - Wash hands before wearing and after removing gloves.

- Follow regular health and safety procedures and regularly used PPE (e.g., gloves, protective or woven sleeves) for blood and bodily fluids (e.g., toileting, spitting, biting).
- Laundry
 - PALS will perform regular laundering services.

VENTILATION AND AIR EXCHANGE

BCCDC Guidance

Continue to ensure all mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are designed, operated, and maintained as per standards and specifications for ongoing comfort of workers ([Part 4 of the OHS Regulation](#)), and that they are working properly. Windows may be opened when the weather permits if it does not impact the functioning of the ventilation systems.

It is important to think of HVAC systems holistically, factoring in both outdoor air supply and filtration. The combination of outdoor air supply and filtration can significantly influence indoor air quality. PALS will regularly maintain HVAC systems for proper operation. PALS will consider guidance for school ventilation systems offered by [ASHRAE](#).

PALS has a plan for when the ventilation system is temporarily compromised (e.g., partial power outage, ventilation break down).

When using air conditioners and fans in ventilated spaces, air will be moved from high places to lower places instead of blowing air directly from one person's breathing zone to another's. Avoid horizontal cross breezes.

Natural ventilation (operable windows, etc.) and portable HEPA filter units are regularly used at PALS. Use of portable air conditioners and fans in unventilated spaces with doors and windows closed will be avoided, except when necessary (e.g., during high or excessive heat events).

PALS will use BCCDC resources, including on [Heat Event Response Planning](#) and/or [Wildfire Smoke](#), in planning for excessive heat events, and the school will consult Fraser Health authority for guidance as needed.

HAND HYGIENE

BCCDC Guidance

Rigorous hand washing with plain soap and water or using an [effective hand sanitizer](#) reduces the spread of illness. Everyone should practice diligent hand hygiene and schools should facilitate regular opportunities for students and staff to wash their hands.

To learn about how to perform hand hygiene, please refer to the BCCDC's [hand hygiene poster](#).

PALS will:

- Facilitate regular opportunities for hand hygiene:
 - This can include using portable hand-washing sites and/or alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers containing at least 60% alcohol.
 - PALS will use commercial hand sanitizer products that have met Health Canada's requirements and are authorized for sale in Canada.
- Ensure hand hygiene supplies are always well stocked including soap, paper towels (or air drier) and where appropriate, alcohol-based hand rub with minimum of 60% alcohol.
- If hands are visibly soiled, alcohol-based hand sanitizer may not be effective at eliminating microbes. Soap and water are preferred when hands are visibly dirty. If it is not available, use an alcohol-based hand wipe followed by alcohol-based hand rub.

RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

BCCDC Guidance

Parents and staff can teach and reinforce good respiratory etiquette practices among students, including:

- Cough or sneeze into their elbow or a tissue. Throw away used tissues and immediately perform hand hygiene.
- Refrain from touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Refrain from sharing any food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, or vaping devices.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

HEALTH AWARENESS AND WHAT TO DO WHEN SICK

BCCDC Guidance

School administrators should ensure that staff, other adults entering the school, parents, caregivers, and students are aware that they should not come to school if they are sick and unable to participate fully in routine activities. School administrators can support this practice

by communicating the importance of not attending school if sick and unable to participate fully in routine activities.

A health check means a person regularly checking to ensure they (or their child) are not experiencing symptoms of illness that would limit their ability to participate fully in regular activities before coming to school to prevent spread of communicable diseases within the school settings. Schools do not need to monitor students or staff for symptoms of illness.

Staff, students, or other persons in the school setting who are exhibiting symptoms of illness, such as respiratory illness, should stay home until they are well enough to participate in regular activities or otherwise advised by a healthcare provider. Those experiencing certain illnesses, such as gastrointestinal illness caused by norovirus, may be advised to stay home for longer.

Staff, children, or other persons can attend school if their symptoms are consistent with a previously diagnosed health condition (e.g., seasonal allergies) or symptoms have improved, and they feel well enough to return to regular activities. If you are unsure or concerned about your symptoms, connect with your health care provider or call 8-1-1.

PALS administrators will ensure that everyone entering the school is aware and routinely reminded of their responsibility to practice health awareness, including that they should not come to school if they are sick. This will be supported through communications (e.g., emails/letters to parents and staff), orientation activities (e.g., meetings, videos) and other reminders (e.g., signage on doors).

PALS does not require a doctor's note to confirm the health status of any individual, beyond those required to support medical accommodation as per usual practice, and as per the Staff Attendance policy.

WHAT TO DO WHEN SICK AT SCHOOL/WORK

BCCDC Guidance

If a staff member, student, or other person develops symptoms of illness at school and is unable to participate in regular activities, they should be supported to go home until their symptoms have improved or otherwise advised by a healthcare provider. Appropriate infection control precautions should be taken while the person is preparing to leave the school premises, including use of appropriate hand hygiene and cleaning/disinfection of surfaces soiled with bodily fluids. They may use a mask if they are experiencing respiratory symptoms.



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PALS administrators will follow the procedures below for students and staff who become sick while at school/work:

- Continue to have non-medical masks on hand for those who have forgotten theirs but would like to wear one (for both the person who is sick and for those who may be assisting them).
- Make arrangements for the student/staff to go home as soon as possible (e.g., contact student's parent/caregiver for pick-up).
- PALS will have a space available where the student or staff can wait comfortably for pick-up and are separated from others.
 - Students must be supervised when separated. Supervising staff can wear a mask, should avoid touching bodily fluids as much as possible and practice diligent hand hygiene.
- Staff responsible for facility cleaning should clean and disinfect the surfaces/equipment which the person's bodily fluids may have been in contact with while they were ill (e.g., their desk in a classroom, the bathroom stall they used, etc.) prior to the surfaces/equipment being used by others. Cleaning/disinfecting the entire room the person was in (a "terminal" clean) is not required in these circumstances.
- Request that the individual stay home until symptoms have improved and they feel well enough to participate in all school-related activities.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES/DIVERSE ABILITIES AND/OR RECEIVING HEALTH SERVICES

BCCDC Guidance

Staff and those providing services to students with medical complexity, immune suppression, receiving direct or delegated care, or with disabilities and diverse abilities who are in close proximity to a child should follow routine infection control practices and care plans for the child, if applicable.

PALS will implement communicable disease prevention measures that promote inclusion of students with disabilities/diverse abilities.

In-class instruction may not be suitable for some children (or families) with a severe immune compromise or medical complexity, which should be determined on a case-by-case basis with a medical care provider. PALS will follow regular practices for those needing alternative learning arrangements due to immune compromise or medical complexity to ensure access to learning and supports.

Staff and service providers providing health services that require being in close proximity to a student should follow the student's individual care plan (if one is in place) and their standard



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risk assessment methods to determine what PPE is needed for communicable disease prevention (e.g., gloves for toileting).

PALS will continue to have non-medical masks on hand for those who have forgotten theirs but would like to wear one.

SPACE ARRANGEMENT

BCCDC Guidance

In learning environments, schools can use classroom and learning environment configurations and activities that best meet learner needs and preferred educational approaches.

TRANSPORTATION

BCCDC Guidance

For school buses, schools should implement the prevention measures included in the [BCCDC Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K-12 Schools](#), where applicable.

Buses used for transporting students will have communicable disease prevention measures in place in line with those in place in the school, and/or as applicable.

VISITORS AND COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

BCCDC Guidance

Schools can follow normal practices for welcoming visitors and the community use of schools.

Visitors, including community groups using the school, should follow applicable communicable disease prevention measures outlined in this document.

GATHERINGS AND EVENTS

BCCDC Guidance

School extracurricular and social gatherings and events (including those occurring within and between schools), regardless of location, can occur in line with the [BCCDC Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K12 Schools](#).

School gatherings and events will have communicable disease prevention measures in place in line with those in place in the school.

CURRICULUM, PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

PALS will implement communicable disease prevention practices (e.g., cleaning and disinfecting, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette) specific to the activity.

FIELD TRIPS/TRADES IN TRAINING/WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS

Students enrolled in individual training/work experience programs will follow the communicable disease prevention plan required by the workplace/facility or the field trip venue. Classes (or other similar groupings of students) participating in training/work experience programs or field trips will follow the more stringent measures (if applicable) between PALS and the workplace/facility/field trip destination's communicable disease prevention plans.

6. PERSONAL PRACTICES

HEALTH AWARENESS, HAND HYGIENE, AND RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

Everyone at PALS should practice health awareness (including staying home when sick), hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette as described in the relevant sections above.

MASKS AND FACE COVERINGS

BCCDC Guidance

The decision to wear a mask is a personal one, based on individual preference. Some students and staff may choose to continue to wear a non-medical mask or face covering throughout the day or for certain activities. The choice of staff and students to choose whether they practice additional personal prevention measures should be respected. Information on non-medical masks is available from [BCCDC](https://www.bccdc.ca).

Masks are one layer of protection used to prevent the spread of communicable disease. To be most effective, wearing a mask should be combined with other important protective measures such as getting vaccinated, staying home when sick, and regularly practicing hand hygiene. Masks are most effective when fitted, worn and handled correctly.

PALS will support those who choose to wear a mask, including:

- Promoting a supportive school environment for mask wearing through mask-specific messaging, including at assemblies, in announcements, signs, and written communications. Some people wear masks to reduce risk of communicable disease and it is important to be respectful of other's choices.
- Continuing school-wide efforts to create safe and inclusive learning environments free from discrimination, bullying and harassment. Bullying and disrespectful behaviour and conduct related to personal mask use is unacceptable.

PERSONAL SPACE

Staff and students should be encouraged to respect others' personal space (the distance from which a person feels comfortable being next to another person).

FOOD SAFETY

BCCDC Guidance

Schools that provide food services under the [Food Premises Regulation](#) should adhere to the required measures (e.g. a FOODSAFE trained staff member a food safety plan, etc.) For special events or sites requiring food permits, please consult your local health authority environmental health officer.

Staff, students, or other persons in the school setting should follow routine food safety practices, including diligent hand hygiene. More information may be found on the [BCCDC Food Safety webpage](#).

Staff and students are encouraged to not share items that come in contact with the mouth (e.g., food, drinks, unwashed utensils, cigarettes, vaping devices). Shared-use items that touch the mouth will be cleaned and disinfected between uses by different individuals (e.g., water bottles, instrument mouth pieces).

7. ADMINISTRATOR PROTOCOLS FOR MANAGING COMMUNICABLE DISEASE ACTIVITY AT SCHOOL

BCCDC Guidance

Most communicable diseases experienced by students and staff within school settings can be managed by the individual/family and through routine preventative measures, such as staying home from school until well enough to participate in regular activities. Information resources are available to support management of routine communicable diseases, including [HealthLink BC](#), the [BCCDC Guide to Common Childhood Diseases](#), and other school health resources hosted on health authority webpages (Vancouver Coastal Health; [Fraser Health](#); Interior Health; Island Health; Northern Health).

Public health works closely with education partners to support the health and wellbeing of students and staff in school settings. Public health may become directly involved if certain reportable diseases, such as measles, are identified where there are effective interventions available to prevent further spread and protect against severe disease. Additional time-limited public health measures may also be implemented at the discretion of the Medical Health Officer or the Provincial Health Officer in response to broader risk of communicable disease transmission in the community.



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School or district administrators can contact public health if they have concerns about communicable disease transmission within the school setting and require additional support.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PROTECTING PERSONAL PRIVACY

Medical Health Officers play the lead role in determining if, when and how to communicate information regarding increased communicable disease activity within PALS. PALS will routinely communicate to the school community the need to practice health awareness, and to stay home when sick. This will include following public health measures, if in place. To protect personal privacy and to support accuracy, PALS will exercise caution in providing communicable disease notifications beyond when they are recommended by public health.

FUNCTIONAL CLOSURES

A functional closure of PALS is the temporary closure of the school as determined by PALS administration due to a lack of staff to provide the required level of teaching, supervision, support, and/or custodial to ensure the health and safety of students. This would likely be due to a high number of staff or certain employees away who are required for the school to function, and the inability to temporarily replace them. PALS administrators will follow the PALS Functional Closure Protocol (*see Appendix A*) and they will notify their Medical Health Officer and the Ministry of Education and Child Care (erase@gov.bc.ca) when they are considering or implementing a functional closure.

PUBLIC HEALTH CLOSURE

A public health closure is the temporary closing of PALS ordered by a Medical Health Officer when they determine it is necessary to prevent the excessive transmission of a communicable disease.

8. KEY CONTACTS, ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & LINKS

APPENDIX A

Functional Closure Protocol (updated November 7, 2022)

Illness is still prevalent in schools and the workplace, despite COVID-19 restrictions being lifted. PALS Autism School will do its best to keep a robust list of substitute instructors and continue best hygiene practices to ensure safe staffing ratios are maintained; however, the following protocol will be activated on days when 4 or more school staff are missing from the ratios needed to safely operate our programs.

The assistance of PALS families is greatly appreciated in helping keep the school from closing completely in these rare and infrequent situations. Families are expected to have PALS In Touch notifications turned on so requests for volunteers are not missed.

Step 1:

Around 7:00am – Head of School or designate determines 4 or more staff on the daily schedule cannot be replaced.

Step 2:

Around 7:05am – Head of School or designate will use PALS In Touch 'PSG Group Chat' and 'Newsfeed' to request for family volunteers to stay home. All volunteers will have their choice to be reimbursed the daily tuition rate or to receive 6 volunteer credit hours. *Note, if you elect to keep your child home on a day when volunteers are not requested, PALS cannot provide a tuition credit.*

Step 3:

Around 7:20am – If not enough volunteers come forward to alleviate 2 or more spots on the daily schedule within 15 minutes of the request, the Head of School or designate will send a notification via PALS In Touch 'Daily Log' to 2 or more families stating their child *must* stay home and that they will receive a tuition/volunteer credit for the day. Compliance with this enforcement is greatly appreciated as it ensures the entire school does not need to be closed for the day (see step 4). *When Step 3 is activated, the school will systematically work through a list of students to ensure a different student needs to stay home each time so it is as fair a process as possible.*

Step 4:

Around 7:35am – If the families contacted in Step 3 don't acknowledge and confirm receipt of the message to stay home within 15 minutes of the message being sent and not enough volunteers come forward by that time, the Head of School or designate will announce a Functional Closure of the school via PALS In Touch 'Newsfeed' and 'Daily Log'. The entire school will be closed for the day, and potentially subsequent days until sufficient staff support ratios can be achieved through substitute instructors and student absences.