

7.0. Safe Schools

7.40.C. SAFE SCHOOLS – PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS GUIDELINES

Adopted:

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Policy Reference:

Legal Reference: Pandemic Influenza: Preparedness Guidelines for Manitoba School Divisions and Schools (K-12), October 2007 Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning: Leadership of the K-12 Pandemic Response Audit Report, April 2022

Pandemic Preparedness Guidelines are meant to be educational and provide Lakeshore School Division with operational guidelines in the event of a pandemic.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Lakeshore School Division will work towards reducing risk to students, staff and communities while prioritizing minimal disruption to student learning.

Schools will not automatically close. The working expectation is that schools will continue to operate and provide an environment that is as safe as possible during a pandemic. Closures/remote learning should be a measure of last resort only implemented if other actions are not adequate to reasonably protect students, staff and communities.

GOALS

- To minimize the impact of the pandemic on students and staff.
- To maintain services to students and families as long as it is safe to do so, or until directed otherwise.
- To respond to outside needs, if required, as determined by a central government authority or local government.
- To ensure essential services continue during a pandemic (ex: supervision, curricular requirements, building security).
- To communicate accurately and in a timely manner with management, staff, and students and families regarding operations before, during and after a pandemic period.
- To track and monitor the activities and additional costs of responding to the pandemic.

IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

Educational continuity in schools could be impacted by:

- employee absenteeism
- student absenteeism
- interruption of services and supplies and reduction in outside supports
- potential school closures
- potential additional duties
- financial losses or incremental costs
- potential spread of infection at school
- staff and students becoming ill at school

MANAGEMENT OF PANDEMIC

Preventative Steps

People should take steps to prevent themselves from becoming infected and from spreading infection to others. Under the guidance of public health a pandemic plan might include measures such as:

- making efforts to improve your general health status through healthy living behaviors such as exercising eating well, getting enough sleep and not smoking;
- washing and/or sanitizing your hands often and teaching others to do the same;
- keeping your hands away from your mouth, nose and eyes;
- not sharing eating utensils or drinks, or school supplies such as pencils or rulers, or musical instruments with mouthpieces;
- covering your cough;
- wearing a well fitting mask
- getting a vaccine (when available); and
- staying home if you are sick.
- increased sanitization, disinfection and/or cleaning of surfaces

PANDEMIC CO-ORDINATION

Government of Manitoba

The Government of Manitoba will establish an incident Management System (IMS) during an pandemic or any large scale emergency that affects the province.

Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization (EMO): EMO will lead the response to an pandemic. Primarily, it will work with government departments at local, provincial and federal levels to help manage the emergency.

The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health: will lead public health emergency preparedness and response efforts for pandemics and may issue public health orders

The Office of Disaster Management (ODM): This Manitoba Health organization is responsible for providing the framework for the health sector response to a pandemic influenza to ensure a coordinated response within the health sector.

Municipal Government

The role of a municipal or other local government during an emergency is to continue normal services. The municipal government is obligated to ensure that its citizens' basic humanitarian needs are supported during any emergency. These needs could include emergency social services.

Health Service Providers

During any emergency, the regional health authorities will continue to provide health services and will provide public health advice to local citizens, businesses and organizations. During a pandemic influenza, the regional health authority will also likely distribute and administer vaccines and antiviral medications. Each regional health authority has a Medical Officer of Health and public health doctors with expertise in areas such as controlling the spread of communicable diseases and authority to issue orders under The Public Health Act. Medical Officers of Health will have a key leadership role to play during a local response to a pandemic.

School Divisions

Schools will not be automatically closed. The working expectation is that schools will continue to operate and provide an environment that is as safe as reasonably possible during a pandemic. Manitoba Health, Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization, and Manitoba Education and Early Learning have the authority to close schools for health emergency responses.

PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT TEAM

Membership of Pandemic Planning Team

- Divisional safety officer
- Director of Operations and Infrastructure
- Superintendents
- Secretary-Treasurer
- One Trustee (board chair or designate)
- LTA (president or representative)
- CUPE (president or representative)

Each school's Emergency Response Team will act as a school level pandemic planning team when necessary.

The Pandemic Planning Team will meet as necessary upon declaration of a pandemic to fulfill the goals and objectives of the Lakeshore School Division Pandemic Preparedness Guidelines.

STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

The interest of students is paramount in the determination of academic concerns in the event of a pandemic.

Students will be educated to make appropriate personal health decisions during a pandemic.

During a pandemic, every effort will be made to continue to offer school services as normally as possible.

Schools will provide students and parents/guardians with timely communication regarding the school's plans and expectations for continued instruction.

If necessary, continuation of course work and assignments may be facilitated through independent course work and technology.

Decisions on day-to-day instructional matters will be the responsibility of the school principal and Superintendent.

Decisions to extend the term, revise exam schedules or alter the academic schedule will be made by the board of trustees and Superintendent.

Decisions will be made at the school level regarding students who have missed or not completed work due to illness, class cancellations, or other reasons connected to the pandemic.

In the event of a school closure, students may be redeployed to other schools or locations in the division.

In the event schools close, schools will provide parents with as much lead time as possible, the reasons for the closure, and a realistic estimate of the duration of the closure.

Section 262 of The Public Schools Act allows parents to keep children out of school if they are ill.

All students will be asked to remain away from school and not attend classes if they are showing symptoms. Parents and guardians will be asked to contact the school and inform the office of the reason for the student's absence.

If a closure of their school has been announced, students will be expected to:

- remain away from the school during the closure.
- monitor the Lakeshore School Division website to determine the state of the alert at the school and establish when they can return. Emergency information will be posted online at www.lakeshoreschooldivision.mb.ca

When a school re-opening has been announced, students will be expected to:

- report to class on the identified day.
- if unable to report to class because they are in quarantine, nursing an infected person, or are ill, they will be asked to contact the school and inform the office of the reason for their absence.

Schools will identify an area where children who may become ill at school can be accommodated until their parents can be contacted to take them home. Parents will also be contacted if their child displays symptoms of influenza.

POTENTIAL SPREAD of INFECTION at SCHOOL

Measures to reduce personal exposure in school buildings will be balanced with the need to maintain normal routines, school operations and societal functioning. Lakeshore School Division will potentially:

- establish a clear and well-communicated message that stresses the need for students and staff to stay home if they are displaying any symptoms.
- minimize social interaction by:
 - limiting visitor access to the school.
 - limiting face-to-face meetings or number of persons in attendance.
 - considering postponing some events that are open to the public and/or parents, including travel for intramural school activities.
 - increasing distance education and work-at-home options.
- promote personal hygiene practices by educating and reminding students and others of the importance of preventive measures.
- in the event a case or cases have been identified in the school a process will be developed for communicating to the community that balances open transparency with the right for personal health information to be kept private.

EMPLOYEES

Employee safety will be an important component of a pandemic response. Lakeshore School Division will communicate Manitoba Health advice on return to school and work timelines to staff, students and parents.

The Division will work closely with unions on emergent issues that may require modifications to regular work arrangements and/or adaption of collective agreements.

Initially, if the school division is shut down, regular employees who would be scheduled to work might continue to be paid. This decision will be reviewed as the duration of the shutdown is assessed.

In the event of a school closure, employees may be reassigned to other schools/facilities within the division or to work remotely. This decision will be reviewed as the duration of the school closure is being assessed.

Administration will work with employees and their union/association representatives to develop an efficient and appropriate reassignment process. The division retains the right to change assignments as needed.

Employees who are unable to attend work due to illness will be covered by the existing sick leave provisions in appropriate collective agreements or division policies and procedures unless extenuating circumstances or Provincial directives indicate otherwise.

Where appropriate, employees may be requested to work from home.

Maintenance of payroll, pension and benefits will be given priority. In instances where inaccurate disbursements are being made, the division will take corrective steps in the post pandemic stage.

In the event of a closure or staffing shortage, Lakeshore School Division may consider deferring staff leaves for non-health reasons, for example professional development, vacation or other reasons, if staff members are needed to cover for absent employees.

EMPLOYEES' RESPONSIBILITY

- Employees will be expected to:
 - immediately contact their supervisor if they are experiencing any symptoms.
 - follow the directions of their supervisor, including immediately departing the school or work site and contacting their physician by telephone.
- If a school or work site closure has been announced while the employees are at work, employees will be expected to:
 - report to their supervisors prior to leaving the school or work site.
 - follow their supervisor's directions, such as reporting to a temporary reassignment, or remaining away from work until notified.
 - keep in contact with their supervisor by phone or e-mail to determine the state of alert and establish when they are to return.
- Once a school or work site re-opening has been announced, employees will be expected to:

- report to work on the identified day, unless they have been advised otherwise by their supervisor.
- if they are unable to report, they are to contact their supervisor to indicate the reason (e.g. under quarantine or are ill with the pandemic influenza, etc.)

RESPONSE PLAN for EMPLOYEE ABSENTISM

Lakeshore School Division may consider these measures in response to high rates of employee absenteeism:

- designate backups for key decision makers and arrange for delegation of decision making and financial authority if they are unavailable.
- discuss possible response measures with the staff currently filling key roles.
- document any administrative activities that might be added during a pandemic or might increase in terms of workload (i.e. contacting the parents of absent children, compiling and disseminating absentee information, etc.)
- cross-train staff on any specialized or technical activities.
- prepare written instructions so that partially trained employees or volunteers can complete essential tasks.
- document location of key information and means of access (e.g. passwords, keys).
- prepare to report excessive absenteeism to health officials for pandemic surveillance purposes.

INTERRUPTION of SERVICES and SUPPLIES

Suppliers are likely to experience operational, production and shipping difficulties and the demand for certain types of supplies may increase dramatically. Some supplies may not be available at all. Costs may also rise.

Suppliers, where possible, will continue to provide normal functions and support during all phases of a pandemic. It is expected that utilities including electricity, natural gas and telephone services will not be disrupted.

It is recommended that the Maintenance Department:

- talk to suppliers to determine if they have plans to deal with emergency conditions.
- build an inventory of critical supplies (ex: for a pandemic.– hand soap, cleaning supplies, tissues, hand wipes).
- have maintenance inspections and repair work done in advance (eg: during the warning period before a pandemic arrives in Manitoba).
- determine how long some systems that require periodic maintenance can operate without inspection or service

COMMUNITY USE

All weekend and evening activities held in Lakeshore School Division schools may be postponed or cancelled for the duration of the pandemic.

Depending on the severity of the pandemic, Lakeshore School Division will determine whether daytime permit holders, such as childcare facilities, should be permitted to continue to operate.

Lakeshore School Division will advise community users of school closure plans and clarify their responsibility for alternative relocation.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

In the event of a pandemic, the Lakeshore School Division Transportation Department will make every effort to continue busing services for students. Reduced or suspended services will be communicated to students, parents and schools.

There may be a need for seating plans and additional cleaning/sanitation of buses. Bus notes may also be cancelled.

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Using information provided by the Superintendent, Lakeshore School Division schools will:

- reinforce messages from reputable sources (WHO, Public Health, Peer Reviewed Journals).
- keep parents and students informed of operational changes to school services.
- Public information sessions (eg. with public health nurses) will only be considered if approved by public health.

This messaging will provide concise, factual information regarding:

- the impact of the pandemic on schools/school division.
- what students/parents can expect from their school.
- what they can do to work with their school.
- when reduced or suspended services will be restored.

BUSINESS PLAN

In the event of a pandemic, there may be a variety of financial implications for schools.

These could include:

- Incremental costs associated with preparing for, responding to and recovering from the emergency. This could include the cost of substitute staff, additional supplies, alternate instruction venues, counselling and communication associated with emergency responsibilities for the school population. If extended hours for child care centres located in schools are required, there may be additional overtime costs for caretakers.
- Extra costs associated with duties assigned for the broader community (if any.)

Lakeshore School Division will include emergency preparedness in its financial management processes. This will include:

- Budgeting processes
- Tracking preparation, response, and recovery activities and costs for:
 - Legal issues that may arise.
 - Reimbursement of eligible costs under any announced disaster recovery programs.
 - School insurance policies that may include business continuity insurance which normally covers temporary costs (e.g. temporary space) that arise from a disaster.

The school division will track incremental costs (the extra costs due to pandemic activities, less any savings from not having to provide some services). This will be useful for planning purposes in future as well as in the event there is any level of compensation made available from the various levels of government.

