

# K to 12 Schools

## Northern Health Supports



**Updated August 2025**

This resource provides information from Northern Health staff on regional and local health promotion initiatives, programs, and resources to support schools in the 2025/26 school year.



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the northern way of caring



# Introduction

Northern Health (NH) supports a comprehensive school health approach to support schools, school districts, and education partners across the Northern region. This work is stewarded by the Regional Nursing Lead (RNL) for Healthy Schools in collaboration with the RNL for Child and Youth and the Public Health Practice Resource Nurse team.

The Healthy Schools RNL serves as a key liaison between schools and NH, helping to coordinate supports, resources, and programs on a variety of health topics, including:

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**For more information and resources:**

- Visit NH’s School and youth health web page: <https://bit.ly/SchoolandYouthHealth>
- Email [HealthySchools@northernhealth.ca](mailto:HealthySchools@northernhealth.ca) to contact the Healthy Schools RNL.

## Communicable disease

NH no longer requires schools to routinely report absenteeism. Schools are encouraged to track causes of absenteeism to detect situations where increased attention to infection control may be necessary.

To request a general NH consultation or assistance with infection control strategies, or should schools become concerned about a situation involving a more infectious disease (e.g. measles or pertussis),

- Connect with the district Superintendent and contact the designated School Medical Health Officer (MHO).
- Send a follow-up email to [HealthySchools@northernhealth.ca](mailto:HealthySchools@northernhealth.ca).

Early communication will ensure:

- Schools, students, and their families receive timely and accurate health information.
- Any necessary infection control measures are implemented promptly.
- NH can take additional action in the broader community, if required.

### General communicable disease (CD) guidance

The Provincial CD Guidelines for K-12 School Settings (found at <https://bit.ly/CDschoolGuidelines>) build on public health guidance and are used by boards of education, independent school authorities and schools to support CD prevention planning. For more information visit:

- CD Prevention in K-12 Schools: <https://bit.ly/CDK-12schools>
- Quick Guide to Common Childhood Diseases: <https://bit.ly/QuickGuideCD>
- Antibiotic Resources for Educators: [Antibioticwise.ca/teaching/](https://Antibioticwise.ca/teaching/)

### School notifications

Parents and caregivers may, at times, notify schools that their child may have an infectious illness.

- NH will reach out to schools if there is a concern with a risk to others or if there is a need to communicate potential risk with parents/guardians.
- Please check in with us if you are considering sending letters about infections in the school, as we can advise on the content.
- If a parent or guardian has a concern with a potential infectious disease, they should seek assessment from their primary care provider or call the Virtual Clinic: <https://bit.ly/NHvirtualclinic> for assessment.

## Dental health

Oral Health Education kits will be available soon for educators (schools, daycares, preschools, etc.) on loan to provide hands-on oral health learning to their students.

Two types of age-appropriate kits (with included lesson plans) will be available across Northern Health:

- Pre-school aged kits (ages 1–5 years old).
- Primary aged kits (ages 5–8 years old).

Information and loan request information will be available soon on the NH <https://bit.ly/DentalHealthProgramforChildren> web page.

## Environmental health

Environmental Health Officers can provide guidance regarding food safety, water, sanitation, and air quality. This team also completes physical environment inspections of schools. They can advise on a range of topics including communicable disease prevention and emergency preparedness.

Contact an Environmental Health Officer via:

- The Health Protection central line at 250-565-7322.
- Email: [php@northernhealth.ca](mailto:php@northernhealth.ca).

School meal or snack programs should:

- Apply general food safety practices: <https://bit.ly/FoodSafetyBCCDC>.
- Provide food safety training to staff: <https://bit.ly/Foodsafetycourses>.

School meal programs that only serve food to students and staff do not require a health operating permit. School cafeterias that serve food to the public or are rented out by catering groups, may require a health operating permit.

- An NH Environmental Health Officer can help determine if a permit is needed and offer food safety recommendations (see contact info above).

Visit the NH Environmental health web page: <https://bit.ly/NHenvironmental-health>.

## Tobacco and Vapour Products Enforcement Program

Tobacco and Vapour Products Enforcement Officers provide education, conduct routine and complaint inspections which include:

- Restricting the sale of tobacco and vapour products to youth.
- Monitor advertising and display violations targeted toward youth.
- Ensuring compliant products are being sold in retail locations.
- Smoke-free-environments.

Northern Health's Tobacco and Vapour Products web page provides information on resources, how to file a complaint, and current information on inspection reports for tobacco and vapour retailers across the region. Access them here: <https://bit.ly/TobaccoVapourEnforcement>.

## Food and nutrition

A Population Health Dietitian can provide evidence-informed guidance and support to schools, school districts, and school partners across the North on a variety of topics including:

- food literacy and nutrition education (e.g. developmentally appropriate curriculum and educator training),
- school food programs (e.g. meal and snack programs, salad bars (<https://bit.ly/saladbar-equipment-kits>),
- supportive school food environments (e.g. BC's [School Food Toolkit](#)),
- allergy aware schools,
- disordered eating prevention and body image concerns,
- granting opportunities, and more.

For more information or support, visit NH's Healthy eating at school web page <https://bit.ly/HealthyEating-at-School> or email [PopHthNutrition@NorthernHealth.ca](mailto:PopHthNutrition@NorthernHealth.ca).

## Harm reduction

The Toxic Drug Crisis continues to have a heavy impact on BC residents with approximately six lives being lost each day. According to the 2024 BC Coroners Service report, unregulated drug poisonings were the leading cause of unnatural death among youth under 19 years of age between 2019–2023. Each life lost has a devastating impact on families and communities. (See <https://bit.ly/2024BCCoronersReport>).

**Naloxone is an opioid antidote which, when paired with rapid recognition of an opioid poisoning and proper ventilation, can be life saving.**

On July 1, 2025, the Minister of Education issued the Support Services for Schools Ministerial Order (<https://bit.ly/SchoolsMinisterialOrder>), which includes a mandate for school boards. Under this order, school boards are required to:

- Establish and maintain a policy for responding to unexpected health emergencies.
- Align school policy with WorkSafeBC requirements (<https://bit.ly/WSBCreqs>).
- Make this policy publicly available.
- Ensure naloxone is available and readily accessible in schools.

Implementation of the order is supported by the Response to Unexpected Health Emergencies Policy (<https://bit.ly/RUHEpolicy>). Per this new policy, naloxone must be made available at all:

- Public secondary schools by December 31, 2025.
- Public middle and elementary schools by September 8, 2026.

In addition:

- Naloxone storage should be clearly marked and accessible.
- Naloxone should be routinely checked to ensure it has not expired.
- Naloxone should be presented to the school and community in a non-stigmatizing way to encourage its use and community comfortability.

Policy templates are being developed to support schools with this requirement and will be available through school superintendents. For more information contact [harmreduction@northernhealth.ca](mailto:harmreduction@northernhealth.ca).

## **Naloxone procurement for school use**

Injectable naloxone kits for schools for staff/occupational use can be ordered online via the Product Distribution Centre (PDC) at <https://bit.ly/ProductDistributionCentre>. For assistance in ordering naloxone kits for public schools, please contact: [PDCCustomerSer@gov.bc.ca](mailto:PDCCustomerSer@gov.bc.ca) or 604-927-2000. Pricing is determined by the PDC.

Intranasal (nasal) naloxone is administered by spraying naloxone in the nose. Nasal naloxone can be purchased through a community pharmacy. Please note that some pharmacies may not routinely stock naloxone; therefore, it is recommended that schools connect directly with pharmacies in advance to place an order.

## **Naloxone training**

Online and self-guided training is available free of charge at the following sites:

- Naloxone 101 Course: <https://bit.ly/Naloxone101Course>.
  - Comprehensive opioid drug poisoning recognition and response training.
- Take Home Naloxone Training: <https://bit.ly/THNaloxoneTraining>.
  - Best for refreshing knowledge.

Additional online and in-person training is available through St John Ambulance: <https://bit.ly/StJohnAmbulanceNaloxoneTraining>.

Contact [harmreduction@northernhealth.ca](mailto:harmreduction@northernhealth.ca) for more information.

## Immunizations

Routine Kindergarten, Grade 6 and Grade 9 immunizations continue to be offered.

- Kindergarten (K) clinics will be held in a health centre setting (not in schools) and include routine screening opportunities for hearing and dental where possible (see the Vision health section for current provincial guidance) in addition to immunizations.
- A care provider will reach out to local schools to offer clinics in the school setting for Grades 6 and 9 students. This year Grade 6 and Grade 9 immunizations do not require multiple spaced doses within the school year.

The first school immunization clinic opportunity will take place between October and November. During the remainder of the school year, additional opportunities will occur to catch-up those students who missed the planned in-school immunization dates. Ideally this will be offered in the school setting, however in some instances the student will be recalled to the local health unit. Additional efforts will continue beyond the school year to provide catch-up opportunities for those who were unable to be vaccinated during the school year.

This year there may be a request to do school based targeted catch-up immunizations. Due to a variety of reasons, some communities and grades would benefit from additional efforts to boost immunization rates and protection from vaccine preventable diseases. If this is the case for your community, schools will be contacted by a care provider from the local health unit to coordinate this work.

## Vaccine Status Regulation and Reporting

Vaccine Status Regulation and Reporting (VSRR) is a biennial process (next VSRR is expected during the 2026/27 school year), which aims to:

1. Ensure up-to-date immunization records for school-age children are consolidated and accessible in one place, the provincial immunization registry (Panorama). This will enable targeted service delivery and quick identification of under-immunized and unimmunized students in the event of school-related communicable disease outbreak.
2. Encourage catch-up of missed immunizations, increasing the number of school-age children protected from vaccine-preventable diseases.

The VSRR requires parents/guardians to report the vaccination status of their school-age children to health authorities, and for health authorities to collect immunization records and provide catch-up opportunities for school-age children who appear to be missing one or more vaccinations.

The regulation applies to all students in all schools within the province's jurisdiction, including those who are home-schooled. It does not apply to children attending schools in First Nations communities.

### Additional VSRR key points:

- Following the STIX and non-STIX remediation in October, the regional CD team will download IMM049 reports from Panorama. VSRR outreach efforts will exclude certain grades: K, 1–3, 6 and 9.
- IMM049 reports will be shared with primary care assistants in each community to help them anticipate the volume of letters and plan immunization activities accordingly.
- Information letters from the Chief MHO, NH, will be sent to school Superintendents/Principals and parents, informing them of the upcoming VSRR outreach.



- Panorama report packages will be shipped to schools, followed by the distribution of VSRR envelopes to students by school staff.
- Local Health Units should coordinate with schools to retrieve any undeliverable envelopes.
- Based on previous campaigns, approximately 10% of envelopes may not reach students and will require reconciliation by the Health Unit team.
- Reconciliation process: After retrieving undelivered envelopes, Health Units will mail them to students' home addresses. Each envelope will include return-to-sender information (Regional Manager, CD Team) to ensure any undelivered mail is returned to NH.

### **Class list information and in-school immunization:**

Following the successful STIX and non-STIX remediation in Panorama, Health Unit teams will generate the student enrollment information from electronic records in Panorama to support planning for in-school immunization events.

They may contact schools to verify the class list information generated from Panorama to ensure accurate clinic planning.

### **Educational and promotional resources for immunizations:**

Kids Boost Immunity: <https://kidsboostimmunity.com> is a free online platform for Canadian teachers to engage digital-age students. There are lessons with interactive quizzes that reflect science, health, and social studies curriculum across BC and Canada. Students can earn a vaccine to donate to a child in another part of the world for each quiz they successfully complete.

CARD resources for children and youth with needle phobia: <https://bit.ly/CARD-system> from the BC Centre for Disease Control. The CARD system provides strategies that can be used to help cope before and during vaccination and needle procedures. The system consists of toolkits for health care providers, school staff, parents/guardians, and students, and includes resources such as videos, handouts, and activities.

## **Injury prevention**

The Injury Prevention team provides resources to support students in developing safety skills.

Resources are available for different age groups on a wide variety of topics, including:

- Concussion prevention.
- Safe walking and biking.
- Summer and winter sport safety.

These educational materials can support curriculum development, projects, and can be shared with parents and guardians.

For more information and additional topics, visit NH's Injury prevention web page: <https://bit.ly/NH-Injury-Prevention>.

## Legal substance use; Prevention of harms

NH has created the following resources to help support and collaborate with school staff in reducing the impact of smoking and vaping among youth:

- Smoking and Vaping Toolkit for Schools: <https://bit.ly/smokingvapingtoolkit>.
- Smoking and Vaping Resources for Schools: <https://bit.ly/smokingvapingresources>.

These resources, and others, are available on the NH Smoking and commercial tobacco reduction web page: <https://bit.ly/smokingcommercialtobacco>. You can also email [legalsubstances@northernhealth.ca](mailto:legalsubstances@northernhealth.ca).

Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health for Youth recommends that youth delay drinking as long as possible. The healthiest option for youth is not to drink alcohol, but if they do drink, try to avoid binge drinking (<https://bit.ly/Alcoholyouthguidance>).

The age at which youth start to use cannabis is important in preventing harm. Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines for Youth, By Youth ([bit.ly/Cannabisguidelinesyouth](https://bit.ly/Cannabisguidelinesyouth)) recommends youth delay cannabis use as long as possible until brain development is complete, and then start low and go slow.

You can view these guidelines and other helpful tools on the NH Cannabis web page: <https://bit.ly/NHCannabis>.

### For additional supports related to substance use, consider the following resources:

- Addictions, alcohol and other substances: <https://bit.ly/addictions-alcohol-othersubstances>.
- Alcohol:
  - Foundry (foundrybc.ca): <https://bit.ly/foundrybc-alcohol-use>.
  - Drinking and your health: <https://bit.ly/drinking-and-your-health>.
- Cannabis information: <https://bit.ly/talk-about-cannabis>.
- Erase/Substance Use: <https://bit.ly/ERASE-substance-use>.
- Substance use: <https://bit.ly/FNHAWithOpenArms>.
- Tobacco and vapour supports:
  - Province of BC: <https://bit.ly/HelpQuittingTobacco>.
  - Talk Tobacco: <https://bit.ly/IndigenousTalkTobacco>.
  - Quitnow: <https://bit.ly/BCQuitNow>.

## Mental wellness

Mental health is the way that you think, feel and act. Good mental health supports problem-solving, realistic thinking, and goal setting. Mental health is different from mental illness; watch this video to understand the difference: <https://bit.ly/mentalhealthvsmentalillness>.

Anyone, including those with mental illness, can take steps to care for their mental well-being. When children or youth face mental health or substance use challenges, families can refer to the NH Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Resource Guide for local and virtual support options: <https://bit.ly/resourceguideforfamilies>.

Schools aiming to support the mental wellness of students and staff can explore a range of helpful resources, including:

- The NH School and Youth Health web page, under the Mental Health and Emotional Wellness section: <https://bit.ly/NHschoolsmentalhealth>.
- The NH Mental wellness page has general information as well as links to pages specific to 2SLGBTQI+, child and youth, and adults: <https://bit.ly/NHMentalWellness>.
- The newly released Language Matters guide also offers practical tools for educators to foster supportive conversations and raise awareness around mental health and substance use. See <https://bit.ly/language matters guide>.
- Virtual Foundry BC, a service for youth 12 to 24 years of age to access free and confidential health and wellness services. See <https://bit.ly/FoundryVirtualBC>.
- The BC Children's Kelty Mental Health Resources Centre has created videos and infographics for families and caregivers with knowledge and tools to support child and youth mental health. Topics include anxiety, navigating difficult family transitions, eating disorders, OCD and self-harm. See <https://bit.ly/BCChildrensKeltyMH>.

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## NH Healthy Communities E-Brief

This monthly newsletter from the Healthy Communities team aims to keep local governments and community organizations in Northern BC informed about resources, events, and funding opportunities that support community health and well-being.

E-briefs can be viewed online at <https://bit.ly/e-briefs-and-updates>.

To subscribe, send a blank email with “subscribe” in the subject line to [healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca](mailto:healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca).

## NH IMAGINE Community Grants

IMAGINE Community Grants support projects that address community-led health and wellness initiatives while improving the well-being of all Northern BC residents. School staff and students are welcome to apply for projects that focus on one or more of the following health and wellness priorities:

- Active living
- Climate and health action
- Community diversity
- Community safety
- Food security
- Harm reduction
- Mental wellness

For more information, visit the IMAGINE Community Grants web page: <https://bit.ly/NHIMAGINE>.

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## Northern BC Healthy K to 12 Schools Newsletter

The Healthy Schools RNL publishes this newsletter twice per school year — in the Spring/Summer and late Fall/Winter. You can view current and previous issues on the NH School and youth health web page: <https://bit.ly/healthyschoolsMHOs>, under the section titled “Communication to Schools from Medical Health Officers”.

The newsletter provides timely updates and helpful information from NH and other health partners, tailored for schools, students, and families across Northern BC.

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## Physical activity

Regular physical activity supports not only physical health and development but also improved mental wellness, social connections, sleep quality, cognitive focus, and educational outcomes.

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines: <https://bit.ly/24hourmovementguidelines> recommend the following for children and youth aged 5–17 years:

- At least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily.
- Several hours of light physical activity throughout the day.
- Limited recreational screen time.
- Minimized extended periods of sitting.

Because students do not have equal opportunities to engage in extracurricular physical activity, schools can play a vital role in supporting their ability to meet the movement guidelines. By providing opportunities for movement throughout the school day, schools help students experience the associated health and learning benefits. Opportunities include:

- Incorporating movement into lesson plans,
- scheduling regular screen breaks with movement,
- embedding swimming lessons or field trips into physical education curriculum, and
- promoting and facilitating active school travel.

Some great examples of active school travel resources include:

- Walking School Bus: <https://bit.ly/SchoolWalkingSchoolBus>,
- Bike Bus <https://bit.ly/ParentLedBikeBus>, and
- Drive to 5: <https://bit.ly/DriveTo5>.

Additional resources to support student physical activity and minimize sedentary time include:

- Canadian physical and health education competencies: <https://bit.ly/PHEcompetencies>.
- International school-related sedentary behaviour recommendations: <https://bit.ly/IntSedentaryRecs>.
- Physical Activity and Physical Literacy in BC Schools: <https://bit.ly/SchoolPAPLBC>.

More information on physical activity is available on the <https://bit.ly/NH-Physical-Activity> web page.

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## Potentially life-threatening medical conditions

NH nurses support annual education and training to school staff regarding the emergency management of the following medical conditions:

- **Allergies and anaphylaxis:** Includes epinephrine auto-injector training.
- **Diabetes and glucagon:** Includes glucagon training when requested by a parent.
- **Epilepsy and seizures:** Seizure rescue medication training information is available through Nursing Support Services (NSS) <https://bit.ly/SeizureRescueTrainingNSS>.

NH nurses can also support schools and families to access referrals to NSS if needed, for example for seizure rescue medication training in schools or for children with chronic, complex health conditions whose daily care requires delegation of nursing tasks to school personnel, to permit normal school attendance.

## Sexual and reproductive health

**Comprehensive school-based sexual health education** is essential for promoting the overall well-being and safety of children and youth. Through a collaborative approach involving educators, health professionals, parents, caregivers, and the broader community, students gain critical knowledge about puberty, sexuality, identity, healthy relationships, consent, and personal boundaries. This education helps prevent sexual abuse/assault, unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections, while also supporting mental wellness, fostering respectful relationship, and informed decision-making. Resources for consideration:

- <https://bit.ly/ToolsForUnderstandingConsent>: New guidance for educators and information for parents and students aim to give students a better understanding of consent and help prevent gender-based violence in B.C. schools. Includes resource guides for elementary and secondary schools, as well as the <https://bit.ly/EraseInitiative>.
- <https://bit.ly/TeachingSexualHealth>: An innovative website developed by Alberta educators and health professionals. It offers up-to-date, evidence-based information and strategies for both teachers and parents.
- <https://bit.ly/SexInformationEducationCouncilofCanada>: Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) produces a wide variety of evidence-based sexual health education resources.
- <https://bit.ly/SexSenseLine>: 1-800-739-7367: Need help answering a question? Call Sex Sense, a free, pro-choice, sex-positive, and confidential service provided by a team of registered nurses, counsellors, and sex educators offering information and resources on sex, sexuality and sexual health.
- <https://bit.ly/AlwaysChangingPubertyEducation>: Endorsed Physical and Health Education (PHE) Canada, Always Changing is a puberty education and healthy active living program for students in Grades 5 through 8.

Additional resources can be explored on the NH School and Youth health web page:  
<https://bit.ly/NHsexualhealth>.

**Sexual health services:** Has your school identified a need to improve access to youth sexual health services? Connect with your local healthcare team to explore collaborative opportunities.

NH and school communities can work together to assess, plan, implement, and evaluate sexual health services within school and community settings — ensuring youth have access to the care and education they need.

# Vision health

Healthy eyes and good vision are an important part of a child’s development. When vision problems are found early, it is often possible to correct them before they get worse.

Vision screening by health authority employees continues to be paused across the province until further direction and updates are received from the Ministry of Health.

All children are recommended to see an eye doctor before kindergarten, and annually until age 19. All children ages 0–18 who live in BC are eligible for eye examinations. BC Medical Services Plan will help cover costs for all or some of the exam.

Families with questions or concerns about their child’s vision can be directed to <https://bit.ly/BCDoctorsOfOptometry> to access children’s eye health resources and an eye doctor in their area of Northern BC.

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# Wildfire smoke and extreme heat

As our climate changes, heat events will become more frequent, longer, and hotter in BC (BCCDC). The BCCDC provides and continually updates information on their pages:

- Preparing for heat events (BCCDC) <https://bit.ly/preparingforheatevents>.
- Wildfire smoke: <https://bit.ly/Wildfiresmokebccdc>.

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# Notes:

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#HealthyNorth

**[northernhealth.ca](https://northernhealth.ca)**

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