



Supporting Children and Families in the Pre-primary Program during COVID-19: A Guide for Families



The details in this document are subject to change based on direction from the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. The measures in this document are based on the best available information, practices, and advice provided.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD), the Regional Centres for Education (the RCEs) and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (the CSAP) will continue to follow the advice of the Chief Medical Officer and adjust any plans to re-open schools and deliver education services. All operational plans will be in keeping with these guidelines and any future direction or changes provided by Public Health.

INTRODUCTION

The Pre-primary Program in 2020-21 may look different than it has in previous years.

The safety and well-being of all children and staff is our main priority. Changes have been made to how pre-primary will be delivered to make sure the appropriate safeguards are in place and to follow the *Nova Scotia's Back to School Plan and Public Health Guidance for Schools (Pre-primary to 12)* novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/back-to-school-plan.pdf.

This guide contains a summary of what to expect and what you need to know as your child starts pre-primary. We have included information about routines you can practice with your child, such as the *COVID-19 Daily Checklist* and hygiene practices such as hand washing. We also have provided information on what a day will look like in pre-primary. This information is an extension of what we already practice in pre-primary and what we will continue to do.

The Pre-primary Program in Nova Scotia is a play-based, child-centred early learning experience which supports young children's development and lays the foundation for school success and lifelong learning. A play-based approach to early learning builds upon children's need to make sense of the world through play. Early childhood educators (ECEs) in the Pre-primary Program guide the natural play process and support, extend and challenge children in their play. The program is fully inclusive and facilitates the successful transition to Primary. Pre-primary ECEs guide programming to support the socio-cultural context of all children and families, to create welcoming and nurturing environments for all children.

KEEPING PRE-PRIMARY CHILDREN AND ENVIRONMENTS HEALTHY AND SAFE

MONITORING OF SYMPTOMS

Families will need to monitor and screen their child daily for COVID-19 symptoms before sending them to pre-primary using the *COVID-19 Daily Checklist* novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Daily-COVID-checklist-en.pdf. Your Pre-primary Program will provide you with an updated copy of the *COVID-19 Daily Checklist* prior to the start of pre-primary in September.

Please keep your child at home if they are ill, even if their symptoms are mild. If your child has COVID-19 symptoms, please call 811 to determine whether COVID-19 testing is required. Other circumstances when a child should stay at home are:

- If the child has travelled outside Atlantic Canada in the previous 14 days;
- If the child is a close contact of a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19;
- If the child is awaiting a COVID-19 test result.

For more information on COVID-19 symptoms, testing and self-isolating please see novascotia.ca/coronavirus/when-to-seek-help.

HYGIENE PRACTICES

Handwashing has never been more important, and this will continue to be reinforced daily in pre-primary. Children will wash their hands upon arrival at school, after toileting, before and after eating, before going outside, when coming in from outside, and after coughing, blowing their nose or touching their face.

Pre-primary staff will show children the correct way to wash hands and families can support this through following the instructions in the handwashing poster novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Hand-Washing-Poster.pdf.

Pre-primary staff will demonstrate and reinforce proper cough etiquette by coughing and sneezing into sleeve or a tissue.

THE BUBBLE AND COHORTS

The Pre-primary Program in a school or offsite facility will function as a bubble within the broader school environment to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Where there is more than one pre-primary class in a school, each pre-primary class will stay together and not mix with the other class or other students in the school.

Within a pre-primary class, depending on size, smaller groups or *cohorts* of children with assigned pre-primary staff will be organized. This will assist pre-primary staff in making family connections and communicating, and as well allow for the sharing of toys and materials and use of outdoor space and equipment.

Visitors to schools, including family members are to be limited. Families will not be permitted to enter a pre-primary classroom or have contact with a pre-primary class or cohort inside or outdoors during the school day. Drop offs and pick ups will be done outside, and families will be asked to maintain physical distancing from pre-primary staff and other school staff.

If your child is required to leave the program early or must be picked up due to illness or needs to be dropped off later, please contact your Pre-primary Program in advance to plan.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO MINIMIZE DIRECT PHYSICAL CONTACT

There is a need to balance healthy child development and maintain appropriate safety measures in early childhood environments like pre-primary. Medical experts recognize that younger children cannot be expected to follow physical distancing. Adults can support children to minimize direct physical contact with one another, keeping in mind developmental principles and the fact that young children are by nature social beings. Pre-primary ECEs will support children's understanding of what it means to live in a COVID-19 world and look for their own ideas of what it means to keep themselves and others safe.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING

Additional cleaning and disinfecting will take place each day to ensure that toys, equipment, shared items, and high touch surface areas are cleaned and disinfected regularly.

Classrooms and common areas of the school facility or off-site location will receive a thorough cleaning daily.

NON-MEDICAL MASKS

Non-medical masks are required for pre-primary children who will be taking the bus to school and home in the morning and afternoon. Currently, there is no expectation for pre-primary children to wear masks while they are in the classroom or outdoors.

A very small number of children and adults will not be able to wear masks due to sensory or health issues.

Families will need to reinforce with their child the proper wearing of a mask if the child is required to wear one. Guidance for the proper use, wearing and handling of non-medical masks can be found here: novascotia.ca/coronavirus/staying-healthy/#masks.

For families, wearing a non-medical mask beyond the minimum requirement to wear one is a personal choice. It is important to treat people with respect regardless of their individual decisions about the usage of non-medical masks.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF PRE-PRIMARY

BEFORE ARRIVING AT PRE-PRIMARY

Before arriving each day, please monitor and screen your child for COVID-19 symptoms using the *COVID-19 Daily Checklist* novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Daily-COVID-checklist-en.pdf.

Please keep your child at home if they are ill, even if their symptoms are mild and contact your Pre-primary Program to let them know.

WHAT TO SEND WITH YOUR CHILD

Please send your child each day with a packed lunch and water bottle (all items labeled with their name). If your child requires daily medication or has other needs to be considered, please let your Pre-primary Program know prior to the start of the program.

Your Pre-primary Program will tell you what other items should be sent such as indoor footwear and a change of clothing to have on hand.

Please do not send toys, stuffed toys, blankets or other objects from home. If your child has a special attachment to such an item, please contact your Pre-primary Program. Staff will work with you to support your child in transitions and offer alternative strategies.

MORNING DROP OFF / BUSING

A drop off area will be designated for pre-primary children and located outside the school or off-site facility (with a plan for inside in the event of poor weather). Families will drop off their child to the pre-primary staff who will be located at the designated area. Adults will maintain physical distancing.

Pre-primary children who take the bus will be assisted off the bus by designated staff. The school transportation team will advise you on how pre-primary children will be supported. Once off the bus, staff will accompany pre-primary children to their class.

HAND WASHING BEFORE PLAY

After children are dropped off at the designated area or arrive by bus, pre-primary staff will guide children to a hand washing station to wash their hands before they play. If a sink is not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer will be provided and used under supervision.

THE DAY

Pre-primary staff will provide experiences that support the learning goals and objectives in the *Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework* regardless of whether children are indoors or outdoors.

Pre-primary children will begin and/or end their day in the outdoor play space. Children will play to learn outdoors as much time as possible throughout the day. Outdoor play is one of the safeguards in helping to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

Pre-primary ECEs are highly skilled and will provide play-based learning opportunities to support all areas of development while outdoors. Children will read books, build with various materials, engage in individual sensory play and create using a range of writing and art materials. The learning that is possible in the outdoor environment is endless.

While children will spend much of their day outside in a range of weather, this may be limited during extreme weather or other risks (such as animals or for security purposes). If children are appropriately dressed for the weather with pre-primary staff checking frequently to ensure they are warm, dry and feeling well, children can play outside in most Nova Scotia weather.

Your Pre-primary Program will let you know what clothing to send with your child, or if Muddy Buddies are available at your program as children will get wet and messy as they explore water, mud, sand, leaves and snow. If this is a concern, please contact your Pre-primary Program to discuss further options.

You will also be made aware if there is to be any application of bug spray and sunscreen. If your child has skin allergies or intolerances, please ensure that pre-primary staff are informed.

Hygiene and overall well-being will be the same outdoors as inside, with medication, toileting or self-care needs being met. Hand hygiene will be followed while children are outdoors, as well as cleaning and disinfecting of toys and equipment.

When the pre-primary class or cohort transitions inside, children will be guided to wash their hands before playing with materials inside.

SNACK AND LUNCH TIME

Snacks will be served individually to children and food will be prepared by approved adults (such as educators or food service staff). Public health measures require that children not engage in preparing the snack or family style eating where they serve themselves.

Families are to send packed lunches from home in a manner that does not require staff to handle it. There will be no reheating options permitted for lunches, so warmed items should be sent in an insulated container. If your school has a cafeteria or lunch program, pre-primary children will be able to order lunch. Lunches will be provided in packaged individual servings. Your Pre-primary Program will advise you if these options exist. Where possible, children will eat snack and lunch in the outdoor area.

Children will be guided to wash their hands before and after eating snack and lunch.

AFTERNOON PICK-UP / BUSING HOME

The pick-up routine will take place in the same designated area as the morning drop off unless advised otherwise.

Pre-primary children who are bused will be assisted on the bus by designated staff. A family member or caregiver is to meet the bus at the arranged stop and must wear a non-medical mask when entering the bus to assist the child.

MORE INFORMATION

DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO ATTEND PRE-PRIMARY?

Pre-primary is a voluntary option so the choice to send your child always remains with you. Pre-primary staff will support you and your child in making the best choice for your family. However, if you decide to not send your child due to illness or for other reasons, please contact your Pre-primary Program to let them know. Your Pre-primary Program will provide you with contact information before the start of the program in September.

WHAT IF MY CHILD BECOMES ILL DURING THE DAY?

If your child becomes ill at pre-primary, you will be contacted and asked to come or have the person you have identified as being permitted to pick up your child to come and collect your child as soon as possible. While your child will be isolated from other children while waiting, they will always be supervised. Pre-primary staff will advise how and where to pick up your child.

HOW WILL MY CHILD WHO HAS IDENTIFIED NEEDS BE SUPPORTED?

The Pre-primary Program is fully inclusive and supports all children. Pre-primary staff and other team members of services which may currently support your family and child will communicate with you to learn more about your child, what they like to do, and what your goals are for your child. This information combined with staff knowledge of the routine and the Pre-primary Program, will be used to develop, if necessary, a plan which outlines how your child will be supported during the day.

The Pre-primary Program does not have Educational Assistants. Pre-primary ECEs provide programming that considers the whole group of children to ensure all experiences are offered in a manner that allows anyone to interact regardless of ability. Additional staffing needs to ensure a quality, inclusive early learning experience for all children, are determined by the team and through discussions with families.

If your child has a life-threatening allergy or illness, it's important to contact your Pre-primary Program before their first day. Pre-primary staff will provide you with the necessary forms to be completed and help develop a plan to support your child. They will also have a discussion with you about the impact COVID-19 preventative measures may have on your child and their overall health and well-being. This might include a wearing a medical or non-medical mask as recommended by your child's health care team, or if they have any allergies or sensitivities to cleaning products, soap or hand sanitizer.

WILL CHILDREN BE SHARING TOYS AND OTHER MATERIALS? ARE THERE ENOUGH? WILL SHARING TOYS PUT MY CHILD AT RISK?

Children will be supported to minimize direct physical contact with one another including not sharing food and drinks and personal items such as water bottles, backpacks, hats, hair pieces, lip chap, etc. At snack and lunch time, children will not self-serve, prepare or share food or drinks.

Public health measures have been put in place for cleaning and disinfecting toys and high touch surfaces throughout the day in addition to ensuring children and staff wash their hands frequently. Sharing of toys and materials will be minimized through several ways. Toys and equipment made available for children's use will be of materials that can be cleaned and disinfected. Plush toys and other fabric items will not be made available. If toys are mouthed, they will be removed for cleaning and disinfecting after the child has finished using it. Toys and materials will be batched, so that after one set is used, it can be taken away for cleaning and a clean set made available. Children will be assigned to a cohort and pre-primary ECE, which will limit the number of children using toys and materials at any one time.

Pre-primary children will be outdoors for a good portion of the day. These same measures will be followed outdoors.

HOW CAN I COMMUNICATE WITH MY CHILD'S PRE-PRIMARY ECE?

Pre-primary staff will help to make you feel welcome and supported in the Pre-primary Program. Families are experts on their children, and we strive to work as partners and encourage families to be active in all decisions as they relate to their child. Families can expect:

- **Early contact from your child's pre-primary ECE.** They will be asking for information from families on the best methods of communication and preferred languages as well as information to help them get to know your child and family.
- **Orientation prior to the start of the program.** Orientation will look different this year because it will not be held at the school. You will be contacted prior to the start of pre-primary with information on how orientation will happen in your program.
- **Regular communication.** Pre-primary staff will keep in touch in many ways including phone calls, text messages, emails, social media, video chats, recorded videos, and regular mail.
- Up to date communication on any changes required to comply with public health measures.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHAT MY CHILD IS LEARNING WHEN I CAN'T SEE IT?

Pre-primary staff use observation and documentation to identify and capture the learning of individual children or groups of children. Observation is when we watch children, how they are playing and what is happening in that play. Documentation is how we record what is happening, through photos, videos, learning stories or in note form.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO MAKE CHILDREN'S LEARNING VISIBLE?

Making children's learning visible means using children's words, photographs, videos, sketches, and other pieces of their work to tell a story of the child's learning process. This is usually done together with the children. We make your child's learning visible so that:

- Children can see the process of testing out their thoughts, ideas, and experiences.
- We can capture and track children's learning experiences, thinking processes, and ideas.
- Pre-primary ECEs have evidence of what and how children are learning to share with families.
- Next steps can be planned in response to children's play, activities, and ideas.

When children see themselves in the room through the documentation, they feel valued for their ideas, thoughts and questions.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD'S EMOTIONAL HEALTH DURING THESE DIFFICULT TIMES?

Social and emotional development is a child's ability to understand the feelings of others, control his or her own feelings and behaviors, get along with other children, and build relationships with adults. It is expected that children will demonstrate, at times, challenges with self-regulation as they develop their social-emotional skills. It is through relationships that children learn they matter, how to regulate their emotions and to stay calm in times of distress. Families will receive the resource *Social Emotional Learning in the Pre-primary Program* as part of orientation which explains these concepts.

In our changing world, it is becoming increasingly evident that our own and our children's emotional health is a key factor in dealing with and understanding the changes society is going through. Through our relationship with your child, we can provide them a sense of security and predictability as well as a safe space for them to work through their concerns. If you have any concerns about your child including their emotional health, please be sure to reach out to pre-primary staff. They will be able to assist you in ideas and accessing resources.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THERE IS A COVID-19 OUTBREAK IN MY CHILD'S SCHOOL OR OUR COMMUNITY? WILL PRE-PRIMARY CLOSE?

If there are positive cases of COVID-19 in your community or school, public health will provide direction to the school, the families and the broader community on the immediate next steps. The *Nova Scotia Back to School Plan* novascotia.ca/coronavirus/education/#public-schools includes information on what to expect if community transmission of COVID-19 requires a change in schools, including pre-primary.

Schools could move to partial or blended opening scenario. For pre-primary, this will see pre-primary classes move to cohorts with a maximum of 15 children and assigned pre-primary ECEs. Cohorts will have the same children and staff staying together each day the same as in our September full opening. Additional spaces will be designated to accommodate cohorts and may include space previously used to accommodate other grades. Public health measures for outdoor play/learning, food, cleaning and disinfecting, and sharing will be the same as those in the September full opening.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health could direct schools, including pre-primary to close. This would last only until it was safe to return to school with full or partial opening. If this were to happen, the Pre-primary Program will be delivered through **Play2Learn@Home** where pre-primary staff will support children and families in their learning through play in their home environments. Children will receive a take-home bag containing a journal, pencils, crayons, glue stick, scissors, and the *Let's Play Together* booklets. Pre-primary staff will engage with children and families at least weekly based on what works best for each family including videos, applications such as Google Hangout, social media, text, email and phone. Opportunities will be provided regularly for families to talk about what is working, what is difficult, how your child is coping, and your questions or concerns.

RESOURCES

Capable, Confident and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework
ednet.ns.ca/docs/nselcurriculumframework.pdf

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations
 NCPMI challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu

MORE QUESTIONS?

For more general information on the Pre-primary Program and to watch our pre-primary video series, please visit ednet.ns.ca/pre-primary.

If you have questions about pre-primary or have any concerns, please connect with the Pre-primary Program staff in your Regional Centre for Education or the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial:

Region	Pre-primary Manager/ Supervisor	Email	Phone
Annapolis Valley Regional Centre for Education	Deanna Hamilton/ Amie DeLeavey	deanna.hamilton@avrce.ca amie.deleavey@avrce.ca	902-844-0698 / 902-670-0678
Cape Breton-Victoria Regional Centre for Education	Rhoda Muller	rhoda.muller@gnspes.ca	902-574-2880
Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education	Nicki Beck	becknl@ccrce.ca	902-890-8413
Conseil scolaire acadien provincial	Lyse Anne LeBlanc	leblancla@csap.ca	902-227-5497
Halifax Regional Centre for Education	Renee Forbes	rforbes@hrce.ca	902-464-2000 x 4424
Strait Regional Centre for Education	Carolyn Webber	carolyn.webber@srce.ca	902-631-4617
South Shore Regional Centre for Education	Gillian Kiely	gkiely@ssrce.ca	902-521-3203
Tri-County Regional Centre for Education	Jaime Spates	jaime.spates@tcrce.ca	902-307-2546