



## Guidance for Families of Immunocompromised Children in School and Group Gatherings

Updated: July 10, 2020

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The current recommendations are:

- Maintain physical distancing and good handwashing.
- Most children with immune compromise can return to school and other group gatherings, when safety measures are in place.
- Protective self-isolation is only recommended for children with severe immune compromise, on a case-by-case basis.

In general, children are much less likely than adults to catch, spread, or have severe illness from COVID-19.

Some diseases and treatments affect children's immune systems. Children with weaker immune systems have immune compromise. These children are more likely to get sick with different types of infection.

As we learn more about the COVID-19 virus, we see that there have been very few cases of severe illness in children with immune compromise. There is no convincing evidence that the risk of COVID-19 is different for children with mild immune compromise from the risk with other common types of respiratory virus infections.

School and contact with other children is critical for healthy social and emotional development, physical exercise and connecting with friends. Prevention measures are now being used to do this safely, including hand washing, no face touching and physical distancing.

At the present time here in BC, all parents and children are advised to take precautions to avoid infection with COVID 19. Extra precautions to keep children at home and away from all others (protective self-isolation) are no longer recommended in most cases.

This may be different for children with severe immune compromise, such as those who have had a recent organ transplant, who are on intensive chemotherapy, those receiving high doses of steroids, those with severe immune deficiency diseases.

Learn more about school and child care safety at: <http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/School-childcare-safety-guidance-parents.pdf>



If you have a child with immune compromise:

1. **Understand the level of risk for your child.** Your child's specialist team will tell you about your child's risk of getting an infection. Your child's level of risk depends on their illness and its treatments, and other risk factors like pre-existing lung disease.

Your child's level of risk may be:

- **Low risk:** In general, your child's level of immune compromise does not increase the risk of serious or rare infection.
- **Medium risk:** Your child's level of immune compromise increases their risk of infection. Your child may be at higher risk to get sick with an infection or stay sick for longer. Or, your child may get sick from an infection that does not affect healthy people. This can happen when your child takes immune suppression medicines for a long time.

Children with immune compromise already take precautions to prevent infection. Most children with immune suppression will be considered medium or low risk, and should take the same precautions for COVID-19 as the general population.

- **High risk:** Your child has a high risk of getting sick with an infection. This includes situations like starting some chemotherapy, treatment with high doses of steroid medications or children with very low white blood cell counts.

Your child's specialist team will explain if your child should be considered at high-risk, and whether protective self-isolation is needed.

2. **For children at high-risk who still require protective self-isolation.** Stay at home and keep apart from other people as much as possible.
  - Precautions will be discussed by your specialist on a case by case basis to see what the best safety plan is for your child.

Your child's specialist team can write letters to school and employers, in support of your household members staying home.

3. **If you or your child has symptoms, get tested.** If someone in your household has new symptoms, they should be tested for COVID-19. The sick person should isolate (stay apart) from other household members, if possible. They should isolate until they get a negative COVID-19 test result.

COVID-19 can cause **many different symptoms**, not just cough and fever. Learn about possible COVID-19 symptoms on the BCCDC website at:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/symptoms>

4. **Continue physical distancing and hand cleaning practices.**

It is still very important to:

- Stay 2 metres away from people that are not in your household
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds



- If a sink is not available, alcohol-based hand rub can be used to clean hands as long as they are not visibly soiled
- Avoid touching your face
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces
- Do not share food, drinks, utensils, etc.

Learn more about protective measures against COVID-19 at: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/common-questions>

