



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

June 15, 2020

The current recommendations are: protective self-isolation and stay away from school and group gatherings

This information from BC Children's Hospital is for children with immune suppression, also called immunosuppression, immune compromise or immunocompromised. Immune suppression means that your child's immune system is weakened by medications or a medical condition. A weakened immune system may not be able to protect as well from infection.

We now know that healthy children generally have mild disease with COVID-19 infection. However, children with compromised immune systems (from a disease or its treatments) may be impacted differently. Children with compromised immune systems are at higher risk from infection, compared with other healthy children. We do not yet have enough evidence to say whether or not children who are immunocompromised are at a higher risk for serious COVID-19 infection. However, we do know that adults who have compromised immune systems seem to have worse disease from COVID-19.

Until there is more information, we assume that children with immune compromise are at higher risk from COVID-19 than healthy children.

In B.C., general public recommendations continue to be for a) physical distancing and b) avoidance of non-essential activities. However, with lowering rates of new infections in B.C., we expect that some of these restrictions may soon be gradually lifted in phases. Children with immune compromise are at higher risk and may benefit from continuing with protection measures (protective self-isolation) while there is still the risk of COVID-19 infection.

We do not know what the impact of lifting restrictions will be on the rates of COVID-19 in the community. It is possible that there will be transmission of the virus and an increase in COVID-19 infections. Once restrictions on public activities start to ease, parents/families of at-risk children will need guidance from their pediatric care teams on when and how to safely resume more public contact for their child and family.

### We recommend:

1. **Understand the level of risk for your child** – Based on your child's level of immunosuppression (according to your child's specialty team), some children may be at a higher risk for more severe infection. This will factor into decisions to recommend ongoing protective isolation for some children and not others. Additional risk factors such as lung disease may modify evaluation of risk for some children.

Your specialist doctors will talk to you about the level of risk from COVID-19 and other infections:

- Low – level of immune suppression not typically associated with a risk of serious or rare types of infection.



- Medium – levels of immunosuppression that are associated with infrequent but more prolonged infection or risk for opportunistic infections. This includes some long-term treatment with medications and sometimes called “maintenance” immune suppression.
  - High – High-level immunosuppression treatments where risk for infection is high and where activities would normally be restricted in order to avoid infectious exposures. This includes some strong, short-term treatments to bring disease under control, sometimes called induction.
2. **Continue protective self-isolation** – It may take several weeks after some restrictions are lifted to know if community spread has gotten worse. This may be a time period of higher risk. Your pediatric care team may recommend that your child continues with protective self-isolation measures and does not return to school for **at least 4 more weeks**, after restrictions on the general public have been lifted and there has been no increase of cases in patients:
- Following flattening of the curve, provincial restrictions are being eased in stages. Increased testing is being performed to properly evaluate whether there is an increase in new infections in the community.
  - If needed, your pediatric care team will help to provide letters to parents and household members during this period in support of continuing to stay away from work and/or school if necessary.
  - These recommendations will be re-evaluated in early July 2020.
3. **Monitoring for development of COVID-19 signs and symptoms** – Anyone in the household with new onset of COVID-like symptoms should be tested immediately. According to public health guidelines, they should be isolated from other household members where possible until tests results are returned negative:
- Active and ongoing testing is now accessible and critical for contact tracing and early case identification. For more information on testing, visit BCCDC’s website: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/testing>
  - We now know that COVID-19 can cause **many different symptoms** (i.e. not just cough and fever). If you think new symptoms might be COVID-19 related, it is better to get tested. Refer to BCCDC updated list of possible symptoms, available at: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/symptoms>
4. **Continue physical distancing and preventive measures** – This is very important even if your family is unable to continue protective self-isolation, for example if a family member must return to work. Your family should continue to adhere to strict physical distancing when outside of the household.
- Frequent hand washing for at least 20 seconds
  - Avoid touching your face
  - Keep a 2-meter distance between people
  - For more information on preventive measures, visit BCCDC’s website: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks>
  - For information on wearing a non-medical mask, visit BCCDC’s website: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/prevention-risks/masks>.

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