

August 17, 2020

Dear Caregiver:

Subject: RETURNING TO SCHOOL for CHILDREN in CARE

We have been living in the COVID-19 world for some time now. Alberta is in Phase 2 of reopening and Alberta Education has set out their [Return to School Plan](#) (the Plan) so children may resume their studies this fall. We know there is a great deal to consider as we prepare children for return to in-class learning.

During the last few months of the 2019-2020 school year, parents and caregivers juggled multiple responsibilities, including parenting, teaching, being school support workers, and homework helpers to name a few. Demands on caregivers were extraordinary. We acknowledge and appreciate your efforts to keep the children in your homes and families safe in very difficult circumstances

As you are well aware, children have not been in a structured learning program for six months. As guardians, caseworkers are obligated to make decisions based on the best interests of the children in our care. Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) Dr. Hinshaw and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have both emphasized that, all things considered, it is best for most children's and youth's overall health and well-being to physically return to school.

Child Intervention Delivery Division has considered the evidence of the importance of returning to school in supporting a child's socialization, their developmental health and positive educational outcomes. All of these benefit when a child has the opportunity to interact directly with peers and others. For the last number of months, our children have been missing the brain stimulation that comes with these extra interpersonal interactions.

We have also considered the potential risks to children and caregivers of children returning to school, along with the extra health protection measures to be taken by schools in reducing those potential risks. Attached is information on the provision of extra masks for children in care to assist in addressing potential risks.

As a result, the preferred option for children in care is that they return to in-class learning at school this fall.

Although many caregivers have the delegated responsibility and may enroll a child or youth in school or vocational training, our standard practice does not adequately cover our current circumstances.

As a result, guardians and caregivers will need to collaborate on making decisions about the best school option for the children and youth in our care.

POSSIBLE EXCEPTIONS:

At-Home Learning – Programming provided by school, teacher led, at home, online

Some school divisions are offering the option of on-line learning at home. This education will be provided by the child's school and their regular teachers. This is *NOT* Home Schooling. For those school divisions that do offer it, at-home learning for children and youth in care is considered an **exception** to the expectation that they physically return to in-class learning at school.

Caseworkers and caregivers who have concerns about Alberta Education's [Return to School Plan](#), their school's specific options, and the potential effects on the child(ren) in their care should speak with the individual school(s) about their concerns. If you believe special circumstances exist for the children or youth in your care and they should be considered for an at-home learning exception, please discuss this with your child or youth's caseworker. *Any exception to children and youth in care physically returning to school will require a Child Intervention manager's approval.* The caseworker will work with you to gather necessary information for their manager's consideration.

We understand how difficult the next number of weeks will be for all of us. We appreciate your patience as we navigate new territory for us all.

As indicated above, we continue to monitor Alberta Health's latest recommendations closely and will update our communication as necessary.

Yours truly,

Policy, Practice and Program Development Branch
Child Intervention Delivery Division

Attachments:

1. Practice Guidance for Return to School
2. Practice Guidance – School Masks

Resources:

Alberta Education: K-12 School Re-entry: <https://www.alberta.ca/k-to-12-school-re-entry-2020-21-school-year.aspx>

If you wish to read more information, the following links contains useful general information on returning to school from the American Pediatrics Academy: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Return-to-School-During-COVID-19.aspx> **Last Updated:** 8/11/2020 **Source:** American Academy of Pediatrics (Copyright © 2020)

Also: <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>