



## COMMUNICATION

### **ISSUE: Updated guidance on close contacts and self-isolation requirements, and COVID-19 variants of concern**

On February 22, 2021, public health officials provided updated guidance on close contacts and self-isolation requirements. As COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC) are becoming the dominant strain of the virus in Manitoba, and in order to reduce the risk of transmission, changes have since been made to the management process for all COVID-19 cases and contacts. The below bulletin provides an updated overview of this guidance as well as information from public health officials on variants of COVID-19.

#### **COVID-19 Variants of Concern**

Variants of the COVID-19 virus are expected and are the result of mutations in the virus. There are, however, several new variants identified that have raised concerns because they may be more easily transmitted, associated with an increased risk of death compared to other variants (although the overall risk of death is still low), or result in decreased vaccine effectiveness. These are referred to as variants of concern (VOC).

COVID-19 VOC, such as those originating in the UK, South Africa, and Brazil, continue to spread globally. The first VOC, originally found in the United Kingdom, was detected in Canada in December 2020.

Our knowledge and understanding of these variants is rapidly evolving. As VOC are becoming the dominant strain of the virus in Manitoba, the goal is to slow the transmission of VOC in the province, allowing for more time to immunize our population. As a result, changes have been made to the management of all COVID-19 cases and contacts. **While public reporting of VOC cases associated with schools will continue, there will no longer be separate notification or different recommendations if the case is a VOC.** What is recommended applies for both VOC and non-VOC cases.

#### **Recommendations for Households with a Close Contact**

In November 2020, public health officials advised that entire households must self-isolate while waiting for the COVID-19 test results of someone in their household. Exemptions were put in place for some critical professions.

On February 22, 2021, public health officials announced changes to the directive. In addition to self-isolating while a household member is awaiting COVID-19 test results, entire households should still isolate if a household member is deemed to be a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case.

#### **Close Contact Definition**

The definition of a close contact remains unchanged to identify more contacts. A close contact is anyone who has been in close physical proximity (less than two metres or six feet) for more than a cumulative total of ten minutes to a confirmed COVID-19 case over the course of a day. It also includes people who provided care for the case or had direct contact with infectious body fluids without the use of personal protective equipment. All household members are considered close contacts. As well, a person would be considered a close contact if they had close face-to-face interactions with someone who has COVID-19 without the use of a mask, even if the interaction(s) were for less than a cumulative total of ten minutes.



### **Self-Isolation Requirements**

It is recommended that close contacts go for testing on notification and at day 10 after their last exposure to the case. Regardless of whether the close contact tests negative, they must complete their 14 days of self-isolation (quarantine); however, household members of the close contact can end their self-isolation (quarantine) when the close contact tests negative, as long as the test has been done a minimum of 7 days after the exposure.

The earlier test on notification is optional; however, if test results are positive, close contacts would begin their isolation period earlier. The test at day 10 is important in identifying asymptomatic cases, and ensuring they self-isolate while they are infectious.

If a close contact does not get tested for COVID-19, the household members of that person should isolate until the close contact completes the full 14 days of self-isolation (quarantine) and remains asymptomatic.

### **Self-Isolation Exemptions for Household Members of Close Contacts or Individuals Awaiting Test Results**

Public health officials have confirmed that critical services workers, which include Kindergarten to Grade 12 education providers (all teachers, administrators, and support staff), who have been directed to self-isolate because a member of their household is either awaiting a COVID-19 test result **OR** a member of their household has been deemed to be a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case, can continue to work as long as

1. they wear a medical mask at all times. Any breaks where the mask is removed should be done in isolation of staff and students
2. they have no symptoms themselves
3. the household member is a close contact, the close contact has no symptoms and is able to self-isolate within the home

These household members should still self-isolate when not at work.

The above exemptions apply for VOC and non-VOC cases. These exemptions do not apply in situations where the staff person themselves is awaiting a COVID-19 test result or has been deemed to be a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case. In these situations, the staff must self-isolate—there are no exceptions.

Public health officials will also advise individuals on additional exemptions if someone has been fully immunized or has had a recent COVID-19 infection in the past three months.

Schools are reminded to review their school plans for staffing and remote learning implications.

### **RELEVANT WEB LINKS**

Manitoba.ca COVID-19 Focus on the Fundamentals  
<https://gov.mb.ca/covid19/fundamentals/variants.html>

For the most up-to-date information on the definition of Close Contacts and the Requirement for Self-Isolation and Household Isolation, see the following link:  
[www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/monitoring/close-contacts.html#what-to-do](http://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/monitoring/close-contacts.html#what-to-do)



## Manitoba Education COVID- 19 BULLETIN

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November 16, 2020; updated from March 1)  
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Please forward questions and inquiries to [educovid19@gov.mb.ca](mailto:educovid19@gov.mb.ca).

Additional information is available on the Manitoba Education COVID-19 website at  
[www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/latest.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/latest.html).