

December 22, 2021

**MANITOBA TO DELAY RETURN TO
SCHOOL TO JAN. 10, 2022**

- - -

**Delayed Return to School to Provide Additional Time for Public Health
Officials to Assess Risk of Omicron Variant: Cullen**

Manitoba will delay the return to school for students following the winter break to Jan. 10, 2022, to give public health officials additional time to assess the risk of the omicron variant in Manitoba and what changes might be needed on the return to school in early January, Education Minister Cliff Cullen announced today.

"As we begin the holiday break across Manitoba schools, the Manitoba government would like to thank students, teachers, school staff, school leaders, school divisions, parents and caregivers for ensuring schools have been safe and open for in-class learning since September," said Cullen. "But right now, things are changing rapidly and public health has recommended a slight delay to the return to school. This will give them more time to better assess the risk and look at options for the new year."

Most students were scheduled to return to school on Jan. 6. The change means school staff will return on Jan. 6 for professional learning and to prepare for the continuation of learning, and students will return on Jan. 10. Many childcare centres will remain open for children under the age of 12 to ensure families can continue to access needed childcare services.

The minister noted the delayed return to school would also provide more time for the distribution of rapid tests to schools provincewide. In addition to vaccination, staying home when one is sick, using masks and reducing contacts, the minister noted rapid tests are another tool that can be used to help screen for cases and provide peace of mind to parents and caregivers.

"We appreciate your understanding and will share any additional information about the return to school as we learn more about the variant and what this means for schools," said Dr. Brent Roussin, Manitoba's chief provincial public health officer. "We have recommended this delay to a return to school in addition to the restrictions under the public health orders and I want to remind Manitobans of the importance of keeping gathering sizes small to allow a safer return to school in the new year."

Roussin noted those eligible to receive a booster vaccine for COVID-19 are encouraged to make appointments or visit a walk-in clinic during the break to better protect themselves and others.

"Again, we extend our thanks to everyone for their efforts over the last several months," said Cullen. "I encourage everyone to do their part to keep schools safe as students head back to class in January by getting vaccinated, minimizing contacts over the holiday break, monitoring for symptoms and, of course, getting tested and staying home when sick."

Manitobans showing signs and symptoms of COVID-19 should use the online COVID-19 screening tool at <https://sharedhealthmb.ca/covid19/screening-tool/> and visit a provincial testing site.

For a list of provincial testing locations, visit:

www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/testing/locations.html#map.