

# Children are entering a fourth school year in a pandemic: Expert advice for parents

August 23 2022, by Brett Goldhawk

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As children head back for a fourth school year with COVID-19, many parents are hoping their kids will be able to enjoy a mostly normal school experience. But with new variants circulating and respiratory

virus season on the horizon, many also have concerns and questions about what the new school year will look like.

We sat down with Dr. Manish Sadarangani, a pediatrics professor at the UBC faculty of medicine and father of three, who shared his perspective and advice for [parents](#).

## **You have three kids yourself—how are you feeling about the school year ahead?**

I would say I'm cautiously optimistic. Our children had three school years that were dramatically disrupted by COVID-19, and we're realizing more and more how much of an impact that has on their social and emotional development. So, I'm hopeful that we can start to see something resembling normal childhood interactions in the school year to come.

## **Are you concerned about the new variants and the potential for a fall/winter wave?**

We are going to continue seeing waves of different variants, but it's difficult to predict right now how frequently those waves will come or how severe they will be. As parents and as a society, we need to remain nimble and open to the possibility that the situation could change rather quickly.

Fortunately, we're now in a very different place than we were at the beginning of the pandemic. Vaccines have provided a high level of population immunity, which means the school year ahead can be very different than those previous.

## **So what can parents do?**

Vaccination is the safest way to build immunity, and we're very lucky that anyone who's six months and older can now be vaccinated in B.C. If your child hasn't received their vaccine, there's still time to build a robust immunity for the [school](#) year and the best time to go would be as soon as possible. Some children may also be eligible for booster doses and parents can check the Immunize BC website for the latest information.

## **With higher levels of immunity, do we still need extra precautions in schools?**

By and large, what's happening in schools should reflect what's happening in the community. We have a lot of data, including from studies here in B.C., showing that transmission within schools largely reflects transmission in the community. So, schools aren't really higher risk environments and the protective measures we take in schools should reflect those we take elsewhere in our lives.

## **Under what conditions should parents consider masks for their children?**

It will vary from family to family. For children who are at increased risk, it's best to speak with the [healthcare professionals](#) responsible their treatment and care. There may be other times when parents want to take extra precautions to make sure their kids aren't going to get sick, whether that's an upcoming performance, a sports tournament, a family vacation or a visit with an elderly or vulnerable family member. It's also important to remember that children have their own views and opinions. Kids have to feel comfortable in their environment, and as parents, we need to talk with them and be supportive of the decisions they want to make.

## How do you recommend parents talk with their kids about COVID-19 leading up to the school year?

Parents know their kids best—try to use language they understand and gauge what level of detail they want to hear. Most importantly, keep the conversation going. Check in with them to see how the [school year](#) is going and find out what they're talking about with teachers and classmates.

## What if my child is feeling anxious?

It's normal for [children](#) to have some level of stress and anxiety as things change. Try to re-emphasize that just because things are changing, it doesn't mean they're any less safe. Make sure they know it's okay not to have a mask, and on the flip side, that it's okay if they still want to wear one. We have to respect people's individual choices and empower our [kids](#) to do the same.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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