

Outdoor teaching and COVID-19

Strategies to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of students and school staff

Created by graduate students in
2^e cycle en plein air at UQAM

*with the collaboration of the
Monique-Fitz-Back Foundation,
the Fédération des éducateurs et éducatrices
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Réseau des unités régionales
de loisir et de sport*

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version, please visit enseignerdehors.ca

Returning to school after the confinement period involves many challenges for school staff. Some of these challenges can be alleviated through the use of outdoor spaces around the school. Outdoor spaces have been identified as important for the learning, health and wellbeing of students, as discussed in the brief on outdoor activity *Quebecers on the Move Outdoors!* published by the Ministère de l'éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur (MÉES).

However, despite the fact that virus propagation is less likely outdoors, measures must be put in place in order to limit transmission of COVID-19 in outdoor spaces¹.

This document provides practical recommendations for school staff in order to make outdoor learning accessible to all students, while respecting the directives of the MÉES and of Quebec's Public Health Expertise and Reference Centre (INSPQ).

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Guidelines to consider from the *direction générale de la santé publique*²

1 Outdoor spaces should be prioritised for teaching subjects such as, but not limited to, physical education, because the virus can't survive for as long outdoors as it does indoors.

2 It is essential to always keep 2 metres of distance between people, regardless of the activity or the intensity of the activity. Given the larger space, it is easier for students to maintain this distance in an outdoor setting.

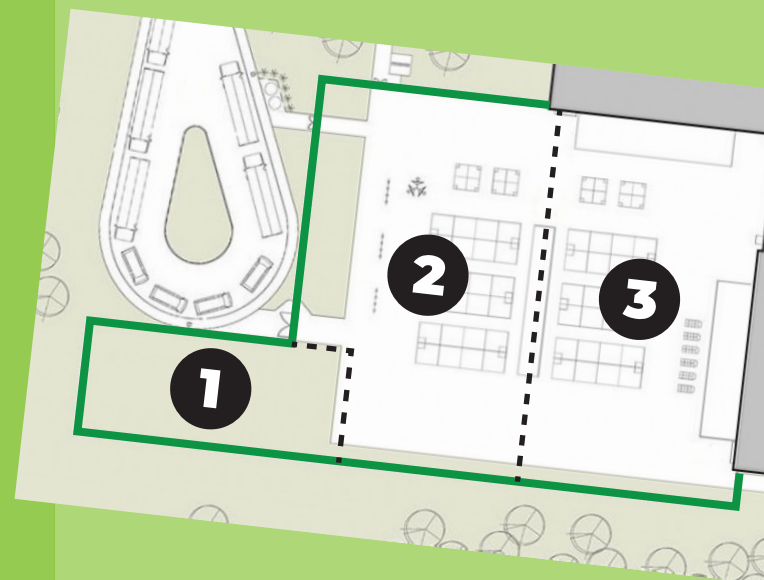
3 It is recommended that students do NOT share any materials. In the event that materials are shared, it is necessary to disinfect them frequently.

4 For any first aid intervention, be prepared with a procedural mask, gloves, and gown.

How can I prepare to teach in an outdoor environment?

The following section contains recommendations specific to teaching outside, whether on school grounds, or in nearby parks and green spaces.

- **Organise the use of outdoor spaces** in order to avoid contact between different groups.
- **Identify appropriate areas close to the school** (school yard, school gardens, parks, green spaces, etc.). Contact your municipality to find out which parks are open and what restrictions are in place.
- **Create a diagram to identify the zones** that will be used by your groups³.



- **Create a schedule and a reservation system** for outdoor learning areas, and make this schedule accessible to all school staff (on line calendar, in the staff room, etc.)
- **Establish a communication protocol** between the teachers who are outside and the school secretary or main office (for example, phone or walkie-talkie) in order to manage the movement of groups of students in case of emergency.
- If your school has a garden, **information and recommendations regarding its use should be made available to all school staff⁴.**
- If possible, **create a station for washing hands outside with soap and water or with an alcohol based solution** (hose, temporary sink, spray bottle of alcohol based solution...)



TIPS and TRICKS

Here is an example of documents prepared by prepared by David Simard and David Dumas, two teachers from the Assomption school in Granby :
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1yMCBpLxMcmT9DETH4OR1MYtmjRXwrg0o?folderid=1WAR05D3GJRBn4BvbjxdXWyg6HqXkYtM3LFY2ZJTy_N1jshD8_Z4JbtAIEggM

How can I prepare my group to go outside?

■ Prepare the outdoor activity

- **Inform parents and students** that you will be using outdoor spaces as teaching spaces.
- **Check the weather and let parents know what each student will need to bring** (appropriate clothing, sunscreen, hat, water bottle, hand sanitizer, etc...). Suggest leaving these items at school for future use.
- **Prepare your teaching materials as well as sanitary materials required for the group** (clipboards, magnifying glasses, water, soap, sanitizer, basic first aid kit with gloves, tissues...).
- **Pay attention to the route to access the outdoor area:** for example, are there funnels where children will have less space to pass and where physical distancing will be more difficult? Examples: Water fountain, fence opening, doorways, narrow hallways or passages...)



TIPS and TRICKS

Provide an object to sit on the floor such as a towel, floor mattresses or foam mats



- Find out from your administration or your municipality, as applicable, if you are allowed to set up shelters and coverings such as a tarp to protect students from rain or sun, or to do specific activities

■ Organise the group before going out

- **Explain the rules and the objectives of the activity** before leaving the classroom.
- **Establish routines that allow students to respect physical distancing** while moving through the school.
 - **Get dressed in small groups** in the corridor or in the classroom, depending on the situation
 - **While moving through the school, stay in line**, 2 meters apart at all times.
- **Stop to use the washroom and wash hands.** Once outside, it may be complicated to go back in for bathroom emergencies.



TIPS and TRICKS

Use a plastic bin to transport the material that will be shared by the students while limiting the use of this type of material to the strict minimum



■ Organise the group once you are outside

- **Clearly delineate the area your group will use and where they can sit** (chalk marks on the ground, rocks, sticks, jump ropes...). As in class, each student will have their “own” place outside.
- **Plan to wash hands periodically (soap and water or sanitizer)** depending on the activity (contact with objects, sharing of objects...).
- **Disinfect any surfaces that are frequently touched** (examples: picnic tables, sheds, accessories, etc)^{5,6}
- **Prioritize activities that allow children to stay two metres apart from one another and avoid touching their faces.** For activity ideas, visit the site enseignerdehors.ca or the *Récit*.



TIPS and TRICKS

For the littles ones, consider holding a 'practice' to learn how to transition from indoor to outdoor areas, and how to maintain 2 meters distance in outdoor spaces.



■ Once back in the classroom

- **Debrief the outing with your class** (what went well, what could we improve for next time, etc.).
- **Disinfect any material that was shared** (ex: balls, hoops, sticks)⁷. It is strongly advised to avoid the sharing of material among students unless absolutely necessary, or to establish a strict protocol to clean all material between users⁸.

Some tips

- Consider which daily routines could take place in an outdoor space: for example, welcoming students in the morning, or snack time.. It is also possible to eat lunch outside on nice days in order to avoid transitioning through the school.
- When planning educational activities, choose simple activities that require little or no materials, that allow two metres of physical distancing and that minimize environmental impact⁹.

During this unprecedented time, students may be experiencing high levels of stress. Research has shown that being in the outdoors has mitigating effects on stress¹⁰. To maximize the potential of the outdoors, be calm, enjoy the sun, the wind or the shade of the trees, and share your well-being with your students.

Outdoor teaching resources

For activity ideas, visit (french only):
<https://enseignerdehors.ca/>

Schoolyard activity guides:
<http://www.greenschoolyards.org/guides>
<https://outdoorclassroomday.com/resources/lesson-ideas/>

Introductory guide to outdoor teaching (in French) published by the Monique-Fitz-Back Foundation
https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/9cc112_563d3360ec824b1a9e117eb30249b63c.pdf

Risk management reference guide for outdoor education : Standard policies and practices for Quebec schools (FÉÉPEQ):
<https://cdn.ca.yapla.com/company/CPY1BPUKeLFWgyVphXqCErvb0/asset/files/documents/Outdoor-education-risk-management-manuel.pdf>

Quebecers on the move outdoors! Brief on outdoor activity.
http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/loisir-sport/Avis_plein_air_VA.pdf

À nous de jouer! L'extérieur, un terrain de jeu complet publié par le Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur
https://hydria-a.cogescient.ca/tmvpa/776e1ce1-64f3-4956-8063-5729d126b8e4/17-00395_L-exterieur-terrain-de-jeu_WEB.pdf?h=76d89cb42ccafa19196f26646ff441d0

For advice and information about outdoor resources available in your region, you can communicate with your Unité régionale de loisir et sport (French only):
<http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/nous-joindre/unites-regionales-de-loisir-et-de-sport-urls-french-only/>

Colloque plein air: <https://colloquepleinair.ca/>

1. <https://www.quebec.ca/education/prescolaire-primaire-et-secondaire/etablissements-scolaires-prescolaires-primaires-secondaires-covid19/mesures-de-securite-pour-les-travailleurs-et-les-enfants-dans-les-ecoles-primaires-et-les-services-de-garde-en-contexte-de-covid-19/>
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjouTTVF9wE&fbclid=IwAR0WxLwLp7VX3c2tiVMqmv5mCsf_OrcImOgLIQZ4HxhPTkpDHHK4qlgaTo
3. http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/ministere/OutilPratiqueOP2_SchemaCourActuelle.pdf
4. <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/covid/2982-jardins-communautaires-collectifs-covid19.pdf>
5. <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/covid/2984-travailleuses-services-garde-covid19.pdf>
6. <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/covid-19/environnement/nettoyage-surfaces>
7. <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/sites/default/files/covid/2984-travailleuses-services-garde-covid19.pdf>
8. <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/covid-19/environnement/nettoyage-surfaces>
9. <https://www.sanstrace.ca/accueil>
10. Nilsson, K., Bentsen, P., Grahm, P., & Mygind, L. (2019). De quelles preuves scientifiques disposons-nous concernant les effets des forêts et des arbres sur la santé et le bien-être humains ? [What is the scientific evidence with regard to the effects of forests, trees on human health and well-being?]. *Sante Publique, SI(HS)*, 219-240. doi:10.3917/spub.190.0219