

COVID-19 Vaccine or Negative Test Policy

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is a medical exemption not mentioned?

We recognize there are legitimate medical exemptions for individuals. Provisions for medical accommodations are in the policy.

Why is a religious exemption not mentioned?

Bishop Mark Hagemoen, and other bishops, have made it clear that the Catholic Church endorses vaccination as a morally acceptable, ethically responsible way to care for oneself and others. Therefore, a religious exemption does not apply, and [a letter from the bishop](#) has made it clear clergy will not provide one if requested. Because the policy offers regular testing as an alternative, a religious exemption, if it was offered by the Church, would not be necessary.

What do I do if I have a conscientious objection to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine?

Having the option to conduct regular testing instead of vaccination is a reasonable alternative for those that may have conscientious objections to COVID-19 vaccines approved in Canada. Pope Francis and the [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#) have made the “duty to protect one's own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good,” clear.

If someone with a well-informed conscience opts to not take the vaccine, they must “do their utmost” to prevent transmission and protect others. When discerning your own decision, one must keep in mind the [Church's teaching on remote cooperation with evil](#), apply the decision consistently, and act to responsibly seek the well-being of others.

[An online article](#) states it another way: “A conscience exemption should not function like a ‘get out of jail free’ card, ... noting the responsibility of Catholics to form their consciences and make well-founded judgments. Those not receiving vaccines should do ‘everything in their power to make sure that they’re keeping others safe.’”

The policy offers the option to use a confidential, free testing process that does not require an exemption process to access.

How is my privacy being protected, whether I reveal vaccine status or not?

Any information collected will be in alignment with provincial privacy legislation and Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (LAFOIP) and will be destroyed at the end of the school year. The procedure put in place to accompany the policy centralizes the information collection process to limit the number of people with access to personal information similar to how all personal, private information is collected, accessed and stored in the division.

For those who are not fully vaccinated or choose to not disclose their vaccination status, a process to discretely pick-up test kits will be in place.

Is this policy in violation of Saskatchewan Human Rights?

The [Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission website](#) states: "Vaccine mandates requiring proof of vaccination or negative testing are generally permissible under the *Code*, so long as individuals who are unable to be vaccinated due to a Code-protected characteristic are reasonably accommodated."

Since our policy does recognize medical and other accommodations by offering rapid tests as an alternative, it is not a violation of human rights.

Is this policy a violation of my Charter rights?

There are specific regulations under *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* that allow the employer to ask for information. The division would not proceed with any policy or procedure unless it was confident that it met all applicable legal requirements. Employees are expected to comply with all policies and procedures of the school division.

Should all staff conduct regular testing as an additional safety measure?

Voluntary rapid tests have been available for staff to use as a monitoring tool for some time. With the Government of Saskatchewan's recent announcement to expand at-home testing in a variety of ways, we welcome the opportunity for more people, including those vaccinated, to have access to this valuable screening tool.

Vaccination has proven to be the most effective measure to mitigate the spread and prevent severe outcomes of COVID-19. Vaccinated individuals are less likely to get infected, and are therefore less likely to spread COVID-19 to others. We all need to be vigilant in observing various layers of safety measures and do our part to curb transmission.

As stated in the policy, testing requirements may be adjusted in response to circumstances in school communities or as a means of expanded surveillance. The division will endeavour to keep testing available.

If a rapid test is positive, what should I do next?

As stated in the policy, a positive test result from a rapid test is considered a preliminary or presumptive positive, and any employee who receives a preliminary positive result must:

- a) inform their supervisor of their absence;
- b) self-isolate and contact HealthLine 811 to report the positive self-test and for further direction on isolation.
 - Self-isolation prohibits employees from entering the workplace.

Where can I get a PCR test to confirm a positive rapid test?

[Visit the Government of Saskatchewan website for the most up-to-date information on testing locations.](#)

The SHA will give individuals who test positive using a rapid test priority for PCR testing. Options for PCR testing in Saskatoon include:

- calling 811 for an appointment
- drive-thru testing at 3630 Thatcher Avenue
 - o Monday to Friday: 12:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
 - o Saturdays and Sundays: 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- Walk-up testing at 2409 22 Street West
 - o Mon-Fri 1:30-4:30
 - o COVID-19 vaccination is also available at this location during these hours.

Are rapid tests safe and accurate?

Rapid tests are safe, easy to use and offer reliable test results. Rapid tests are not a replacement for PCR testing, but qualify as a valid test for the school division's policy. Any positive test from a rapid test should be followed-up with a PCR test.

Various sources indicate an accuracy of 90 – 98 per cent. Time between an exposure to COVID-19 and testing is a major factor in accuracy of rapid/antigen testing, which is why frequent testing is recommended—and required in the division's policy for unvaccinated individuals or those who choose to not disclose vaccination status.

Test swabs are sterilized following industry safety standards with a sterilant used for medical devices and common medical items such as sterile medical wrap. Swabs are aerated to get rid of any residual sterilant. If you have concerns about the use of test swabs provided by the school division, you can discuss concerns with your health care practitioner, and you may be able to provide your own alternative if it meets appropriate standards.

Tests are easy to use, and you will have results in 15 – 20 minutes. Instructions will be included in test kits. The Government of Saskatchewan has some useful information on their [website about rapid-testing in schools](#) (note: not all information on this page is relevant for our division policy). Used tests can be disposed of in regular garbage.