

# What happens in an emergency?



**SAFE AND CARING**  
SCHOOLS

## What happens in an emergency?

**The Toronto District School Board is committed to making each and every one of its schools a caring place that is safe for learning.**

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) takes steps in every school to help keep students safe. Each school develops a plan to prepare for what to do in an emergency. Each plan is developed just for that school and includes:

- what staff will do if there is an emergency
- how staff will get students away from possible dangers
- how students' families will be contacted.

## What kinds of emergency plans are made?

Plans are made for five kinds of emergency:

- a danger or threat in the building itself (from fire, a gas leak, an intruder, etc.)
- a danger or threat caused by very bad weather
- a danger or threat to the neighbourhood around the school
- a danger or threat to the city as a whole
- a danger or threat to Canada as a whole.

## What is an Emergency Evacuation Procedure?

All schools have detailed plans to evacuate (remove) students and staff from the school building in case of a serious danger. This plan is called an Emergency Evacuation Procedure.

## What is a School Lockdown Procedure?

All schools have detailed plans for what to do when there is an emergency and the school cannot be safely evacuated. This is called a School Lockdown Procedure. It includes steps to keep students, staff, and others in the school safe in case there is a serious accident, a violent event, very bad weather conditions or an act of terrorism.

In *an internal lockdown*, where there is danger in the school itself, all students are kept in classrooms or other areas that are chosen as part of the plan to be as far away from danger as possible.

In *an external lockdown*, there is danger outside the school building. When this happens, sometimes the school is the safest place for students and staff to stay.

## Can parents or guardians go in or out of a locked down school?

Parents, guardians and others wishing to go in or go out of a locked down school will only be allowed to do so if and when it is safe for the school's students and staff. It may not be safe, however, until the danger or threat of danger is gone.

## How do schools prepare for emergencies?

Each school develops emergency plans based on guidelines from the TDSB. Plans are made just for that school so that each school can do what it takes to respond successfully to an emergency. Each school has a Safe Schools Committee responsible for making emergency plans.



## What is a Safe Schools Committee?

A Safe Schools Committee is made up of different staff members. The committee makes emergency and lockdown plans and keeps them up to date. The committee also:

- puts together information and supplies that can be carried around for use in a school emergency
- identifies a place or places to which students can be taken in an emergency (evacuation sites)
- develops and keeps up to date the plans for different kinds of emergencies, such as for bad storms or for dealing with an intruder
- makes sure staff are trained on emergency procedures.

## Who checks on school emergency plans?

All school emergency plans are checked by the school's superintendent of education and are kept on file by the Health and Safety Department of the TDSB. The Health and Safety Department is involved in all parts of emergency planning and training as well as in what happens when there is an actual emergency.

## Does the TDSB have any special staff to help in an emergency or crisis?

In addition to school staff, the TDSB also has teams of specially trained workers, such as social workers, guidance counsellors and psychologists, who can support a school going through an emergency or crisis. These are called *school crisis teams*. These teams help train school staff on what to do in emergencies and are there to support school staff during an emergency.





## Do schools practise what to do in an emergency?

All schools hold fire and evacuation drills as well as two lockdown practices each school year.

## What happens in an emergency?

In an emergency, the school principal is in charge and will make sure that staff follow their school's emergency plan.

Staff are responsible for:

- keeping track of students, counting them and making sure they are all there
- making sure students follow the emergency plans
- making sure that no one leaves or enters the building without permission
- contacting the Board and emergency officials to tell them about the emergency.

## How will I know if there is an emergency, evacuation, or lockdown?

The TDSB will broadcast emergency messages, when necessary, over the radio, television and/or internet. General emergency messages, including early and late school openings and closings, can be found on the TDSB's web site, [www.tdsb.on.ca](http://www.tdsb.on.ca). Emergency messages are also broadcast on local television and radio stations. Parents are encouraged to check these sources for updates during emergency situations.

*Parents are asked not to call their children's school during an emergency because this can tie up phone lines and make it difficult for the staff to use the phones as needed during the emergency.*





## Will I be allowed to pick up my child?

In an emergency, the TDSB's most important duty is to keep students and staff safe until the danger or threat is reduced or gone. To keep everyone safe, parents must wait to pick up their children if public safety officials say that there is a reason why people cannot enter the school during the emergency.

Please remember that sometimes staying in the school is the safest place your children could be. Also, remember that having people going in and out of the school during an emergency may increase the danger to your children.

## Is school cancelled in an emergency?

School is not always cancelled in an emergency because in some situations, the school may be the safest place for children to be. This may be true, for example, in a bad snow storm or hurricane.

## What happens in an emergency to those with hearing or physical difficulties?

All schools have to have ways of communicating in an emergency with those who cannot hear. All schools have to have plans for evacuating those who may not be able to move without help.

## What if my child needs medication during an emergency?

If your child takes medication regularly, be sure the school has enough extra medication on hand to last at least for one day. If there is a lockdown, medical emergency staff will be told by staff at the school about any medication needs that students within the building may have.

## What happens when the emergency is over?

Each school emergency plan includes steps for returning students to their parents or guardians after an emergency is finished. *The emergency contact information card is important in helping this happen.*

## What is an emergency contact information card?

Each student in the school has an emergency contact information card which should be filled out by the parents and students. The card lists those people who can pick up a student from the school. Students will only be released to the people listed on their cards.

*Please be sure to complete the emergency contact information card at the start of every school year and to keep your card information up to date with the school office!*

## What if the school is evacuated and the students are taken somewhere else?

If public safety officials decide a school building must be evacuated, students and staff will be taken to a safe location, as part of the school's evacuation plan. Parents and guardians of the students should listen to the radio or television during the emergency. The TDSB may use radio and television to broadcast where the location is and when it is safe to pick up students.

Students will be bussed back to their school after public safety officials say it is safe to do so.

## What if my child is on a school bus in an emergency?

*If an emergency happens involving students on a school bus, then the school bus operators will contact the TDSB office to tell them what is happening and to find out what needs to be done. This will happen, for example, if a school bus with students is involved in a collision or motor vehicle accident.*

*If an emergency happens elsewhere while students are on a school bus, the school bus operators will again be in close contact with the Board office. Bus drivers will be told to avoid the emergency area and parents will be told how and where to pick up their children.*

## Where can I get more information on what happens in school emergencies?

If you would like more information on what happens in school emergencies, you can ask at the school office in your school.

You can also go to the TDSB's web site, [www.tdsb.on.ca](http://www.tdsb.on.ca). Select "Parents" at the top of the home page and then click on "Safe and Caring Schools" underneath to get more information on all Safe Schools matters.

You may also phone the Safe Schools Office in your area of the city:

**Southwest: 416-393-8976**

**Northwest: 416-394-7393**

**Southeast: 416-396-5411**

**Northeast: 416-396-7511**

**Central: 416-393-8933**

*Please note: This pamphlet is intended for information purposes. It is not a substitute for legal advice and is subject to all applicable laws and Toronto District School Board policies. Please contact a Safe Schools Office for more details.*

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