



March 15, 2020

Dear Parents / Guardians:

Re: COVID-19

This past Saturday morning, we participated in a teleconference with Alberta's Chief Medical Officer and the Deputy Minister of Education. The purpose of the call was to discuss Alberta's approach, recommendations and guidelines to keep students and staff safe and healthy.

Alberta's Chief Medical Officer indicated that schools should remain open. Dr. Deena Hinshaw then provide information regarding the implementation of strategies to ensure the safety of students and staff.

We are all very concerned about COVID-19 and information is critical. The following is a short summary from the document Alberta Health and Education provided to school divisions titled, *Alberta Guidance for Schools and Child Care Programs: 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)*.

1. The two most important ways to prevent and control COVID-19, in school settings are:

- For students and staff who are ill with respiratory illness symptoms (fever, cough, fatigue, and/or muscle aches) to stay home from school, and
- The consistent practice of good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene.

2. The use of masks in schools is not recommended. Masks may help people with symptoms reduce their risk of spreading the virus through droplets produced when coughing or sneezing. However, students and staff who have symptoms should be kept away and stay at home from school rather than relying on masks.

- Should a child choose to wear a mask, please let them do so. Do not make negative judgement of the student and ensure others are being considerate of the student's choice.

3. Maintain and increase disinfection practices. WRPS provides specific direction to custodians to increase disinfection of touch points in schools.

4. Put into place practices related to food such as:

- No sharing of food.
- Students should not share utensils, dishes, and water bottles/drink containers.

5. **Support staff and students/families in self-isolation.**

- This is obviously a stressful and challenging practice. Let us be sure to treat these individuals with respect, fairness and compassion with a focus on dignity and privacy protection.
- Upon return (e.g., a 14-day isolation) there is no need for any special monitoring etc.
- Students or staff who had a COVID-19 infection will receive individualized guidance from public health officials as to when they are non-infectious and can return to school. The Division and its schools will not require a doctor's note to return to the school setting.

6. **Parents/guardians: There is a zero tolerance for children with any respiratory symptoms attending school.** Teachers should closely monitor their classrooms, and if any student is having respiratory symptoms such as coughing or symptoms of a mild cold, the steps below should be followed. The same steps should be followed if a staff member begins to experience respiratory symptoms.

- If a student or staff member develops respiratory symptoms while at school, they should be removed from the school environment.
- Schools should promptly separate the student or staff with symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, and including symptoms that may seem like a mild cold) in an area separate from others, with adequate supervision until they can go home.
- To help prevent transmission, the most important steps are to reinforce strict respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene practices and to have the ill student or staff stay two meters away from others. If possible, the student should be placed in a separate room from other students with a closed door. Any rooms they have been in while symptomatic should be cleaned and disinfected before others enter them.
- Masks provide a level of protection when worn by a symptomatic person. It is acknowledged that it is neither practical nor feasible to have schools procure masks at this time, therefore adhere to strict respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene and cleaning and disinfection.
- Schools should notify parents/guardians if their child begins to experience respiratory symptoms while at school and arrange for immediate pick up.
- Students who begin to show respiratory symptoms while at school should be picked up by their parent/guardian and avoid travel on public transport such as school buses. If no alternative is possible, it is recommended that the student sit on a seat by themselves (two metre separation).
- Clean and disinfect any rooms the student was in while symptomatic. There is no need to take any further special precautions or to close the school.
- Students or staff who develop respiratory symptoms should be kept home for 14 days after the start of the symptoms.
- If students are tested for COVID-19, those who test negative will be advised individually about returning to school.

7. **If there are cases of COVID-19 in the local community,** the school may need to take additional steps in response to prevent spread in the school. The Medical Officer of Health or other public health officials will share additional information as needed with schools to support the appropriate response.

8. **If an ill student or staff member attended school prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case:**

- AHS will conduct contact tracing of the case and in consultation with the MOH, inform decisions about appropriate public health measures for staff and students that were at risk of exposure, including instructions about self-isolation (staying at home) or self-monitoring. Local health officials will work directly with the school/school authority administration to determine the best course of action and this may or may not include a school closure.
- Local health officials may recommend temporary school dismissals if a student or staff member attended school prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case. Public Health

recommendations for the scope (e.g., a single school, a full division) and duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis based on the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and information about cases in the affected community.

- Schools should work with the local Public Health department and other relevant leadership to communicate information about the possible COVID-19 exposure appropriately. In such a circumstance, it is critical to maintain confidentiality of the child/student or staff member.
- If a student or staff member has been identified with a case of COVID-19, school administrators will receive guidance from Public Health about when students and staff should return to school and what additional steps are needed for the school community. In addition, students and staff who are well but are taking care of, or sharing a home with, someone with COVID-19 will receive instructions from public health officials as to when they can return to school and other follow-up instructions (e.g., enhanced cleaning, disinfection and hygiene practices).

9. Regarding student mental health:

- Reassure students about their personal safety and health. Telling students/children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting. Reassure them they are safe and there are many things they can do to stay healthy: Hand washing, Cough/sneeze etiquette, Stay home when sick, Keep clean (Keep hands away from face and mouth), Stay healthy (Stay healthy by eating healthy foods, keeping physically active, getting enough sleep).
- Listen to students and provide age-appropriate information.
- Maintain familiar activities and routines at schools as it can reinforce the sense of security of students.
- Monitor for discrimination and/or bullying surrounding COVID-19

10. For persons who have travelled or will be travelling anywhere outside of Canada:

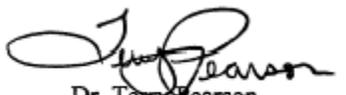
- Travel outside of Canada is not recommended. Any travellers returning from outside of Canada after March 12 should self-isolate for 14 days after their arrival in Canada.

Please Note: The Chief Medical Officer indicated that events and decisions are changing rapidly. Strategies and direction to school divisions may change as a result.

If the strategies or direction changes, we will endeavor to update you using School Messenger and, on our websites.

Thank you everyone for your support of each other and students during this trying and difficult time.

Sincerely,



Dr. Terry Pearson
Superintendent of Schools