

March 11, 2020

Dear Principals and Superintendents,

Re: Update on novel coronavirus

We are writing to give you updated information on the novel coronavirus causing respiratory illness (COVID-19).

In BC, most recent infections have been linked to travel from Iran or close contacts of travelers. While a number of infections were previously reported from Hubei Province, China, public health measures in that region have limited the ongoing export of cases. There have been further cases of COVID-19 in B.C., with some cases now recovered. All active cases are being very closely managed. The risk to British Columbians remains low.

Our knowledge of this virus continues to grow and we are using new information to adjust our public health recommendations. We are aware of early evidence that this virus can cause a range of mild to severe symptoms, and it is possible that people will not recognize symptoms that are mild. During this time, people can reduce the chance of spread by limiting contact with others.

**Public Health advice for students and staff**

- Generally, students with colds who have not travelled may go to school if they feel well enough to take part in activities. Mild symptoms of the common cold may include a runny nose and sneezing. Children with symptoms of fever, cough, shortness of breath or sore throat should stay home from school.
- Students or staff returning from **Iran or Hubei Province, China** are asked to stay home for 14 days after leaving those countries. They should monitor themselves daily for symptoms of fever, cough, shortness of breath or sore throat. Parents and guardians should assess the symptoms of children as needed.
- Students or staff who have travelled to other areas do not need to stay home from school, but should monitor themselves for symptoms for 14 days.
- Students or staff who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-2019 are asked to stay home for 14 days after their last encounter with the infected person. These individuals should monitor themselves daily for symptoms of fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat. Contacts of confirmed cases will be contacted by public health to discuss precautions.
- If a school exposure is identified in follow-up with a confirmed case, public health will contact the relevant school district to discuss next steps.

- Students who develop symptoms should stay home and call their health-care provider or 8-1-1 to discuss any need for testing and follow up.
- **It is not necessary to cancel school events, outings, or field trips to public locations.** However, school trips to affected areas are not recommended at this time. For more advice regarding travel, please consult up-to-date [Health Canada Travel Health Notices](#).

**While these recommendations are important, they are voluntary. School administrators, staff, and parent groups are not expected to enforce or monitor them.**

Please reassure families with students required to stay home that they do not need to worry about missing school and offer opportunities for distance learning or catch up once the students are cleared to return.

The Ministry of Education continues to be in close contact with public health officials at all levels of government and ask the public and school community not to make assumptions about the risk of students or staff based on their ethnicity or travel history.

Medical Health Officers are your school medical officers. Their role is to undertake communicable disease risk assessments and provide guidance on risk management. If you have concerns, including regarding an individual case, please contact your Medical Health Officer or school Public Health Nurse for assistance.

Additional resources can be found at on the [Vancouver Coastal Health website](#). The [BC Centre for Disease Control website](#) also has a comprehensive overview of COVID-19, including resources for students and schools.

Yours Sincerely,



Mark Lysyshyn MD MPH FRCPC  
Deputy Chief Medical Health Officer  
Vancouver Coastal Health