

March 4, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

On Monday, February 24, 2020, all school districts in the province received guidance from the *Office of the Provincial Health Officer* and the *BC Centre for Disease Control* regarding recommended measures for preventing and controlling respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, in schools and childcare settings.

We are writing to provide you with a summary of these recommendations, to tell you how they are being implemented in our school district, and to let you know what steps you can take at home.

### **Prevention**

There are two important ways to prevent and control respiratory viruses in school settings.

The first is for students and staff who are ill with respiratory illness symptoms (fever, cough, fatigue, and/or muscle aches) to stay home from school. If your child is not feeling well, we ask that you keep them home so that they can rest and recover. As always, remember to inform the school of the absence.

The second way to prevent and control respiratory viruses is the consistent practice of *good respiratory etiquette* and *hand hygiene*. *Good respiratory etiquette* includes covering the mouth and nose during coughing or sneezing with a tissue or a flexed elbow and disposing of used tissues in a plastic-lined waste container, followed by hand hygiene. *Hand hygiene* is the washing of hands with plain soap and water, which is effective at removing visible soil as well as viruses.

Children in the school setting should clean their hands:

- before leaving home and on arrival at school.
- after using the toilet.
- after breaks and sporting activities.
- before food preparation.
- before eating any food, including snacks.
- before leaving school.

If you have a younger child, support them at home by supervising and assisting in hand hygiene. In schools, this supervision will be provided by teachers.

**REMINDER:** Masks are not necessary for people who are not experiencing symptoms. In children in particular, masks can be irritating and may increase touching of the face and eyes, which increases the risk of infection.

### **Cleaning and Disinfecting**

Regular cleaning and disinfecting of objects and high-touch surfaces (e.g. door handles, water fountain push buttons) helps prevent the transmission of viruses.

The school district's cleaning and disinfection procedures of high touch surfaces at all of its school sites is in line with the Provincial health guideline recommendations.

**NOTE:** Although water fountain knobs and push buttons will be cleaned daily, consider providing your child with a filled water bottle so that they do not have to drink directly from the mouthpiece of the fountain.

### **Food Sharing**

Students should not be sharing food, utensils, dishes, and water bottles or drink containers. Although this practice is important for preventing exposures to allergens, it is equally important in reducing virus transmission between children.

### **Psychological Considerations**

A new virus such as the COVID-19 can create anxiety and be difficult for students/children to understand, especially if someone in their school or family is sick, or they see or hear troubling messages on the radio, internet or television. It is normal for children to feel worried and nervous and have questions.

Support your children by reassuring them about their personal safety and health. Telling them that it is okay to be concerned is comforting. Reassure them they are safe and that there are many things they can do to stay healthy:

- Wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Cough and sneeze into arm or tissue.
- Stay home if they are not feeling well.
- Keep hands away from face and mouth.
- Stay healthy by eating healthy foods, keeping physically active, and getting enough sleep.

### **Resources**

The Public Health Officer (PHO) and the BC Centre for Disease Control have created a Q&A document to help parents, teachers and families talk to children about COVID-19 - it is available here: [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-\(novel\)#For--schools--and--childcare](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-(novel)#For--schools--and--childcare)

For parents and educators, CBC Kids along with the PHO produced a kid-centric Q&A video about COVID-19 - please feel free to share with your school community. CBC Kids/COVID-19 story: <https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/watch-coronavirus-facts-versus-fiction>

Sincerely,



Scott Stinson  
Superintendent of Schools