

February 7, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Re: Update on Novel Coronavirus

We are writing to give you updated information on the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV), a new virus causing respiratory illness. The highest number of infections continues to be reported from Hubei Province, China. There have been a small number of cases of 2019-nCoV in B.C. which 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 now 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, they can reduce the chance of spread by limiting contact with others.

Public Health advice for students and families

- Students now returning from **Hubei Province, China** should consider staying home for 14 days after leaving Hubei. They should monitor themselves daily for symptoms like fever or cough.
- Students who have returned from Hubei Province in the last two weeks and have been already in the school system do not need to stay home from school but should continue to monitor for symptoms for 14 days following their return.
- Students who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with 2019-nCoV should consider staying home for 14 days after their last encounter. Individuals should monitor themselves daily for symptoms like fever and cough.
- Students who have been in other parts of mainland China (outside Hubei Province) do not need to stay home from school and should monitor themselves daily for symptoms like fever or cough for 14 days.

Those 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.

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

Students required to stay home should not worry about missing school. They will have opportunities for distance learning or catch up once they return.

Advice for Students and Families Considering Travel:

Students and families considering travel to and from China are encouraged to consult the [Novel Coronavirus in China Travel Health Notice](#) on the Government of Canada Travel and Tourism site regularly. Recommendations change as new information becomes available.

Advice on School Events, Outings and Field Trips

It is not necessary to cancel school events, outings or field trips to public locations. However, the Government of Canada has advised to [avoid non-essential travel to China](#).

Advice on masks from Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry:

When sick, wearing a mask helps to prevent us from passing on illnesses to other people. But if you are not sick, wearing a mask may not prevent infection, especially for children who may not be able to wear a mask properly. People wearing a mask may also touch their faces more often, potentially increasing the risk of having the eyes, nose or mouth come into contact with viruses. For this reasons we are not recommending masks for people that are not sick.

Some parents wonder if a child who is returning from an affected area of China should wear a mask to school. Since the main way the virus is spread is through coughing and sneezing, this isn't necessary for healthy children. Wearing masks in public, with a goal of preventing spread of illness, can be a way some communities show respect for others. While we do not recommend wearing masks for healthy children, it is important that any children who do wear masks are treated with respect and not fear.

Reducing the risk of coronavirus, colds and flu

- Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds using soap and water.
- If a sink is not available, alcohol-based hand rubs (ABHR) can be used to clean hands if they are not visibly soiled. If they are visibly soiled using a wipe and then ABHR is effective.
- Do not touch your face/eyes/mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough with a disposable tissue or the crease of your elbow.
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Stay home if you are sick and away from others so you don't pass it on.

A new toll-free phone number (1-833-784-4397) has been established to answer questions from Canadians about the 2019 novel coronavirus. Service is available from 7 a.m. to midnight EST.

Anyone who is concerned they may have been exposed to, or are experiencing symptoms of coronavirus should contact their primary care provider, local public health office, or call 8-1-1.

Yours Sincerely,



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