



Interior Health
Every person matters

February 12, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

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

You may be concerned about the risk to families. The highest number of infections continues to be reported from Hubei Province, China. There have been a small number of cases of COVID-19 in B.C. which are being closely managed. The risk to British Columbians remains low.

As our knowledge of this virus increases, we are adjusting our public health recommendations. We now have early evidence that this virus can cause mild to severe symptoms, and it is possible that people will not recognize symptoms that are mild.

Therefore, we recommend:

- Students returning from **Hubei Province, China** consider staying home for 14 days after they leave Hubei. They should monitor themselves for symptoms like fever or cough. Those who develop symptoms, should stay home and call their health-care provider or 8-1-1 to discuss any need for assessment and testing.
- Students who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 consider staying home for 14 days after their last encounter. Individuals should monitor themselves for symptoms like fever or cough. Those who develop symptoms should stay home and call their health-care provider or 8-1-1 to discuss any need for assessment and testing.
- Students who have been in other parts of China (outside Hubei Province) 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.

Please be assured that students who stay home should not be concerned about school absences. They should be offered opportunities for distance learning or catch-up once they return.

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

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.

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Medical Health Officer

Advice on School Events, Outings and Field Trips

It is not necessary to cancel school events, outings or field trips to public locations. At this time, the Government of Canada has advised the public 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, we do not know if wearing a mask prevents 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 the virus.

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 the goal of preventing the 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 4:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. PST.

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

Further information about novel coronavirus is available on the [BC Centre for Disease Control \(BCCDC\) website](#).

Sincerely,



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Medical Health Officer