

Dear parents, guardians, and families,

This week all school districts in the province received guidance from the Provincial Health Officer and the BC Centre for Disease Control regarding measures for preventing and controlling respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, in schools and childcare facilities.

The Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry has recently stated to the public on February 25 that, “the risk of spread of this virus within British Columbia continues to remain low at this time.” We wanted to ensure you had up to date information about the measures for preventing and controlling respiratory viruses and how they are being implemented in our district. The information will also 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, help them with 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 ensures daily cleaning of high-touch surfaces at all of its school sites.

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.

You can reassure your children that 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.



Office of the
Provincial Health Officer



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

Frequently Asked Questions on New Coronavirus (COVID-19) for Children and Students

Feb. 20, 2020



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the new coronavirus?

The new coronavirus is a virus (type of germ) that causes lung infections in people. The disease is called COVID-19.

This is the first time this exact coronavirus has caused illness in people, but doctors and scientists know of other coronaviruses.

2. Where did the new coronavirus come from?

We think that this coronavirus usually lives in bats. At first, a person was infected from an animal, but now it is spreading from one person to another.

The first people to get sick were in a city in China called Wuhan, in a province called Hubei. Later, people were found to be sick in other provinces of China. A smaller number of people are sick in other countries. Most of the people who are sick outside of Hubei have travelled there or spent time with someone who has travelled to that province.

3. Will people get sick in British Columbia?

There are only a few people in the province of British Columbia who are sick with the new coronavirus. These people have agreed to stay at home so that they don't spread the virus to anyone else.

Right now the chance of becoming sick with coronavirus in British Columbia is very low. There are not that many travellers coming from Hubei province in China to BC. Doctors and other leaders are working to find anyone who might become sick, and to help them so that they don't spread it to others.

If someone is sick, it is most likely from the kinds of colds and flus we normally have every winter in British Columbia.

4. What kind of illness does the new coronavirus cause?

The new coronavirus causes a respiratory (lung) infection. People who are sick with COVID-19 can have a fever or a cough. They may also have muscle aches or sore throat. Some people may feel short of breath.

Most healthy people who are infected with the new coronavirus will have a mild illness like a cold. A smaller number will be more sick, and will need to be in the hospital. Young people are more likely to have a mild illness.

5. How does the new coronavirus spread?

The new coronavirus spreads the same way as other viruses that cause colds and flus.

When people cough or sneeze, small droplets of liquid go into the air. If the person who is coughing or sneezing has the new coronavirus, there can be virus in those droplets that can make others sick.

One way that a person can get sick is by breathing in droplets that have virus in them when talking with or being close to someone who is sick. The other way is by touching something that droplets have landed on and then touching their mouth, nose, or eyes. Sharing utensils and dishes (forks and spoons, water bottles, drink containers, cups) could also spread the virus from someone who is sick to someone who is not.

6. How can I avoid getting sick?

The best way to stay healthy is to wash your hands properly and often with soap and water. Washing your hands properly means using soap and water to wash for at least 20 seconds. If your hands look clean, you can use hand sanitizer with alcohol in it. If they have dirt or food or anything else on them, you should wash them with soap and water because hand sanitizer might not work. If you have to cough or sneeze, try to do it into your elbow or a tissue, then wash your hands afterwards. These things help protect you from the new coronavirus and also from influenza, colds, and other illnesses.

7. Should I stay home from school?

Students who are healthy should attend school. Right now the risk of spread of the new coronavirus in British Columbia and in our schools is very low, and school is important for learning and for friendships. Kids who have travelled to Hubei province are being asked to stay home from school for 14 days. This will make sure they are healthy before coming to school.

Kids who are sick – no matter what they are sick with - should stay home from school until they feel well enough to participate fully in their school day.

8. Should I wear a mask?

You do not need to wear a mask if you are healthy. Masks are hard for students to wear, and they are not needed if you are not spending time close to people who are sick. If you are sick, you should stay home from school. Staying home is a better way to protect others than wearing a mask to school while sick.

Some cultures and families wear masks when they are well out of respect for others. Doctors and leaders in British Columbia do not think this is needed, but it is important to treat people with respect if they do choose to wear a mask.

9. What can I do to support a friend or classmate who is worried about the coronavirus?

It is normal for some of your friends and/or classmates to worry about something new that is happening. They may be worried about becoming sick themselves or worried about friends or relatives in China.

You can help your friends and classmates by listening to their worries and sharing what you know. Let them know that it is very unlikely they will become sick. If you see anyone who is being bullied about coronavirus, stick up for them and ask an adult for help. If you need help, talk to a teacher, parent, or an adult that you trust.

10. Where can I get more information?

You can find trustworthy information about novel coronavirus by visiting the website of the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control at <http://www.bccdc.ca/> and the public information page has more answers at [http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-\(novel\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-(novel)). Some of the information on the website may be scientific or technical so it may be better to look at the website together with a teacher, parent or a trusted adult.

CBC Kids has made a good video that talks about myths kids might have heard about the new coronavirus. Check out the video and full story at: <https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/watch-coronavirus-facts-versus-fiction>