

Memorandum

March 3, 2020

Dear Alberta school staff and parents/guardians of students

Subject: Novel Coronavirus

I am writing again to update you on novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). We know that Albertans, including school staff, students, and parents, continue to be concerned about this particular coronavirus. It is important to remember that the current risk of exposure in Alberta is low.

To do our best to keep the risk of COVID-19 low, Alberta and other provinces are providing advice based on the best current evidence and guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada. Please read the following information for recommendations that apply to you and your family.

Have you or your family been in Iran or Hubei province, China in the last 14 days?

If **yes**, we recommend the following:

- It is best for anyone who traveled from Iran or Hubei to self-isolate (stay at home, not going to school, work, or social gatherings), even if you are feeling well, until 14 days have passed from your last visit to Hubei province.
- This advice is focused on travelers returning from Iran and Hubei province as the risk of community transmission is currently considered to be the highest in these places.
- You should also closely watch for symptoms like fever, cough, or difficulty breathing in any family member who has been in Hubei province in the last 14 days, and call Health Link 811 if any of these symptoms begin.

Have you or has anyone in your household returned from any other parts of mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea or Italy in the past 14 days?

If **yes**, we recommend the following:

- Anyone who traveled to mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea or Italy in the past 14 days should monitor themselves daily for symptoms like fever or cough (with students getting help from their parents) up to 14 days after their last visit.
- If, while you or your family members were in mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea or Italy and were in contact with someone who was

diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, or were in a health care facility, please call Health Link 811 to talk about your possible exposure and to get information on any other measures you may wish to take.

- Although the most likely cause of symptoms like fever or cough is a common virus, like influenza, if someone who traveled to mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea or Italy in the last 14 days feels sick, they should stay home and away from others, and Health Link 811 should be called to talk about any need for testing and follow up.

Have you or has anyone in your household returned from anywhere else outside Canada in the past 14 days?

- If, while you or your family members were outside Canada you were in contact with someone who was diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, or were in a health care facility, please call Health Link 811 to talk about your possible exposure and to get information on any other measures you may wish to take.

We are still in influenza season in Alberta, so to minimize spread of any respiratory virus, for all families we recommend the following:

- Make sure everyone in your household washes their hands with soap and water often. If soap and water are not readily available, you can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer, if hands are not visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Use a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw it in a garbage bin lined with a plastic bag. Wash your hands immediately after that. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve.
- Stay home if you're sick. If your kids are sick, keep them home from school.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are used often and shared by everyone in your home.
- Travelers should always check for current travel notices on the Government of Canada website prior to travel.

Many families are planning trips outside of Canada in the next several weeks. If you are planning a trip, before you leave, please consult the Government of Canada travel advisory website at <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories> to see the most up to date information about any risks you might have on your trip. Make sure you follow the advice above on handwashing and cleaning surfaces whether at home or on vacation.

Finally, while the current risk is low, it is important that we are prepared in case that changes. We are making plans in the health system, should COVID-19 come to Alberta, and you can prepare in your household as well. It is important to remember that most people who get COVID-19 (about 80%) have a mild illness, and don't need medical care to recover. You can make plans for having a lower threshold to stay home from work or school than you normally would with a mild illness, thinking about child care options for sick children that would not put them in close contact with other people. You can also build the healthy habits mentioned above that help protect against all respiratory viruses.

It is natural that we worry about new threats to our health, and the best thing you can do if you are worried is to get up to date information from reliable sources such as Alberta Health (www.alberta.ca/coronavirus) and Alberta Health Services (www.ahs.ca/covid). You can also take the preventive steps outlined above, like hand washing regularly, to reduce your risk of infection.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deena Hinshaw". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "D" and "H".

Deena Hinshaw, BSc, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCP
Chief Medical Officer of Health

