

Memorandum

February 6, 2020

Dear Alberta school staff and parents/guardians of school children,

Subject: Novel coronavirus

I am writing to give you updated information on the novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) – a new virus that causes respiratory illness.

We know that Albertans, including school staff and parents, are concerned about this particular coronavirus. It is important to remember that the current risk to Albertans is low. **There are no confirmed or probable cases of the 2019-nCoV in Alberta at this time.**

Because this is a new virus, information can change as we learn more. For the most up to date information, go to the Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services websites:

- www.alberta.ca/coronavirus
- www.ahs.ca/ncov

Our knowledge of the 2019-nCoV continues to grow as new information becomes available, and this new evidence informs adjustments to our public health advice and actions. Although there is uncertainty on the issue of “asymptomatic transmission” (if an infected person can spread the virus before they get sick and start coughing, etc.), it is unlikely to contribute much to the spread of the virus. The highest risk of virus spread would be from a person who has symptoms like fever and cough.

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 Hubei province, China in the last 14 days?

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

- It is best for anyone who traveled from 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. See the information sheet on self-isolation for details.
- This advice is focused on travelers returning from Hubei province as the risk of community transmission is currently the highest in this part of China.
- 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 your family returned from any other parts of mainland China (outside Hubei province) in the last 14 days?

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

- Anyone who traveled to mainland China in the last 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 in China.
- If, while you or your family members were in mainland China, you or your family members 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 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.

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.

Good hygiene practices that help prevent colds and influenza will also reduce the risk of exposure to 2019-nCoV. Masks can be very important in certain situations. When sick, wearing a mask helps prevent us from passing on illnesses to other people. That is why we ask people who have a cough or respiratory symptoms to wear a mask and clean their hands when visiting an emergency department or clinic. If you are healthy, medical masks are not recommended as they don't provide full protection and can create a false sense of security.

We ask that you do not make assumptions about the risk of others having novel coronavirus based on their ethnicity or country of origin. Alberta has no confirmed or probable cases of 2019-nCoV and the current risk of exposure in Alberta is extremely low. If you have further questions, call Health Link 811.

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 information from reliable sources such as Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the World Health Organization. You can also take the preventive steps outlined above, like hand washing regularly, to reduce your risk of infection.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Deena Hinshaw', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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

Self Isolation

Information Sheet:

Why am I being asked to self-isolate?

Self-isolation can help prevent the spread of infections, such as novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

When you are exposed to an illness, there is a time between the exposure and when you start to feel sick. This is known as the incubation period (usually 2 to 10 days for 2019-nCoV, and up to a maximum of 14 days).

There is a very small chance that you can spread the germs during this time (the few days before a feeling of sickness starts).

More importantly, staying home means that if you do start to feel sick, you won't run the risk of this happening while you are in a public place. Self-isolation is a cautious action used to lower the chance that the virus could spread to others.

It is important to remember that not everyone who is exposed will get sick, and anyone who feels well for the full 14 days after an exposure of concern is not considered to be infectious.

What does self-isolation mean?

Self-isolation means avoiding situations where you could infect other people.

This means all situations where you may come in contact with others, such as social gatherings, work, school/university, child care, athletic events, faith-based gatherings, healthcare facilities, grocery stores, restaurants, shopping malls, and any public gatherings.

You should, (where possible) not use public transportation including buses, taxis, or ride sharing.

As much as possible, you should limit your contact with people and avoid having visitors to your home, but it is okay for friends, family or delivery drivers to drop off food or other things you may need.

You can also use delivery or pick up services for errands such as grocery shopping.

If you need to leave your home for an urgent errand, such as picking up essential medication, as a precaution to further reduce risk of spread, you can wear a surgical mask while you are out.

What else can I do to stop the spread of infection?

Wash your hands

Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. You can use a hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available and if your hands are not visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or you can cough or sneeze into your sleeve. Throw used tissues in the garbage, and immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds making sure you dry them thoroughly, or use alcohol based hand sanitizer.

Avoid sharing household items

You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, pillows, or other items with other people in your home. After using these items, you should wash them thoroughly with soap and water, place in the dishwasher for cleaning, or wash in the washing machine. Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched and shared surfaces such as doorknobs, counters.

Getting food and medicine

Where possible, contact a friend, family member, or delivery services to carry out errands like supermarket shopping on your behalf.

For more information on self-isolation call [Health Link 811](tel:811).