

May 1, 2009

Swine Flu Update

The swine influenza virus outbreak has caused illnesses in various countries, including Canada. We recognize concerns from students, parents and school authorities about the virus and how it may affect schools.

The Ministry of Education will continue to monitor the situation and keep you informed of any necessary action, to ensure the health and safety of our students and schools.

At this point, the cases in British Columbia are all very similar to seasonal influenza, and Provincial Health Officer Perry Kendall is encouraging parents and schools to continue taking practical steps to prevent the spread of illness, but not to be too alarmed.

It's important that school districts across B.C. be proactive in reviewing with students how to wash their hands properly, with warm water and soap, in order to take precautions and help prevent the spread of any illness, influenza or otherwise. If children are sick, parents are encouraged to keep them home from school.

British Columbia has a strong surveillance system in place through its local health authorities, and we will know if there are any clusters or outbreaks within the school system. At this point, there are no reasons for parents or schools to be concerned about children's health while at school.

Latest Updates on Swine Flu

Updates on the impact of the outbreak in B.C. are being provided regularly by the [Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport](#) and the [Ministry of Health Services](#), and this information is available on the [Ministry of Education](#)'s website as well. Please visit these websites for the most current and factual information about the swine flu outbreak.

If you have questions about the health situation in your district, you can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day/seven days a week. Additional [information on the swine influenza outbreak](#) is also available through HealthLink BC.

School Travel

Some schools may be planning travel at this time of year. The Public Health Agency of Canada has issued a travel health warning that [recommends postponing elective or non-essential travel to Mexico](#) until further notice. A separate [travel health notice for the United States](#) has also been issued.

Prevention

As with seasonal influenza, students and school staff are advised to take basic infection control precautions and measures during this time.

Information on how to prevent catching or transmitting the flu is available via the [Fight the Flu](#) button on the Ministry of Education website.

If you have questions about the health situation in your district, please call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day/seven days a week.

Get the Facts About the Flu and Stay Healthy

Influenza is caused by viruses, and is generally spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Here are six simple, common sense precautions that can help safeguard everyone's health:

- 1) Stay home when you're sick or have influenza symptoms. Get plenty of rest and check with a health care provider as needed.
- 2) Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick.
- 3) Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and throw the tissue away immediately. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- 4) Wash your hands. Washing your hands often will help protect you from getting sick. When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers.
- 5) Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. You can become ill by touching a surface contaminated with germs and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- 6) Practice other good health habits. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids, eat nutritious foods, and avoid smoking, which may increase the risk of serious consequences if you do contract the flu.

If you have a fever or cough illness, regardless of where you have travelled, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

See a health care provider if your symptoms become worse but call ahead of time to let them know you have fever or cough illness.

You can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day/seven days a week to speak to a nurse if you have more questions or if feeling ill.

For more steps on how to protect you and your family visit FightFlu.ca.

Additional Information Sources

Progress on this important issue is also available at the following websites:

- B.C. Ministry of Health Services
- HealthLink BC
- Public Health Agency of Canada: Swine Influenza in Mexico
- Public Health Agency of Canada: Human Swine Influenza in United States
- FightFlu.ca

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