

Information for School Superintendents – Regarding “Swine Influenza” April 30, 2009

Dear Superintendent/School Administrator,

This letter is sent to supplement communications you will have received from the Ministry of Education earlier this week related to swine influenza.

Interior Health has received several inquiries from schools related to managing students who have recently travelled to Mexico, international students and students who are ill with respiratory symptoms. As of April 30, we have one student in an elementary school in Vernon with confirmed disease. In this case, there has been Provincial and National consultation on the proper course of action.

The novel influenza virus continues to spread from Mexico and has been identified in many provinces, local identification would be expected soon and more cases are likely, including clusters and possible outbreaks. Locally, and provincially, we will hope to provide you with appropriate direction as needed.

As usual, if there are questions, principals should contact their Public Health Nurses. Superintendents and administrators may contact either the Child Youth Program Consultants or their Medical Health Officers as listed below. There are many sources of information becoming available and we would encourage you to use only the information through the below websites or through direct contact with Interior Health so that all students in British Columbia are afforded the same information and protection.

Interior Health Authority is making the following recommendations:

- Continue all routine educational programs and school activities as per normal; At this time there are no recommended changes to school activities. Schools should adhere to travel advisories that are issued by the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- As usual, report any school absenteeism of greater than 10 percent of the school population to your school Public Health Nurse.
- Allow well travelers arriving from Mexico or other swine flu affected areas to participate in regular activities. Returning students/staff/others should monitor themselves for symptoms and, if experiencing influenza-like illness (fever, cough, muscle pains), should follow the prevention tips below to avoid spreading illness to others.
- As routine, students or staff ill with apparent viral respiratory infections should stay home from school while ill. Students who develop influenza like illness when there is evidence of influenza spreading in the community should remain at home for at least 7 days.
- Encourage the following influenza prevention tips within your school population:
 - Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol based hand washes are effective. (guidance for school use was provided in the fall of 2008. Contact the Child Youth Program Consultants for details if required).
 - Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
 - If you are sick, stay home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
 - If your symptoms become more severe contact your health care provider.

The current influenza virus is a new influenza virus which can be spread from person to person. As a new virus, the population has limited protection to the disease and the virus can spread quickly. Symptoms of this influenza strain are similar to symptoms of other influenza viruses – fever, cough, headache, general aches, fatigue and other symptoms.

As an evolving situation, information will change quickly. Any changes in recommendations to schools from Medical Health Officers will be sent using the usual fax distribution through Superintendent offices. In addition information is available from Health Link BC at 8-1-1 and at the following sites:

<http://www.interiorhealth.ca/>

<http://www.bccdc.org/>

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/index-eng.php>

If you require further information or have questions or concerns please call:

The following are the Interior Health Medical Health Officers:

Dr. Andrew Larder
Senior Medical Health Officer
(250) 862-4092

Dr. Nelson Ames
Kootenay Boundary
(250) 505-724

Dr. Paul Hasselback
Okanagan Central/South
(250) 868-7818

Dr. Rob Parker
Okanagan North
(250) 868-7832

Dr. Digby Horne
Thompson Cariboo Shuswap
(250) 851-7330

Child Youth Program Consultant - Contacts:

Cathy Shether
(250) 851-7413

Rhonda Tomaszewski
(250) 980-5081

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(250) 505-7237