



September 1, 2009

Dear Parents,

As we begin this new school year, we believe it is important to keep you current relative to the H1N1 influenza virus. On August 19, the Public Health Agency of Canada published an information bulletin specifically addressing schools across the country. Since there has been frequent media coverage, you are well aware of the recommended measures. However, the Public Health Agency of Canada emphasizes certain measures that have compelled our school district to introduce some new practices that we wish to share with you.

The pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus has resulted in influenza-like-illness (ILI) similar to seasonal influenza. ILI is defined as *the acute onset of respiratory symptoms with fever and cough and one or more of the following symptoms: sore throat, muscle aches, joint pain, or weakness. Gastrointestinal symptoms may also be present and fever may not be prominent.*

The most important factors in the control of the spread of the ILI virus in schools are:

- Early identification of ill students and staff exhibiting symptoms of ILI
- Exclusion from the setting of anyone ill with symptoms of ILI
- Practicing cough/sneeze etiquette and frequent hand cleaning

The incubation period for pandemic (H1N1) influenza virus is understood to be up to 4 days and the period of communicability up to 7 days from onset of symptoms in uncomplicated cases. This may be longer (up to 10 days) in individuals with severe illness and children in whom symptoms and virus shedding may persist. Consistent with seasonal flu, transmission of the pandemic (H1N1) influenza virus is most likely during the initial days of infection when the individual is symptomatic and has a high viral load.

Instructions to Parents

- Teach your children to use proper hygiene so as to reduce the risk of spreading the virus:
 - Practice cough and sneeze etiquette
 - Use the correct hand washing technique
 - Practice frequent hand cleaning (i.e. after sneezing or coughing, before and after eating, after recreation/play times, after going to the washroom etc.)
 - Keep your child at home if he/she is ill, except to receive medical attention
- Call the school to report your child's absence due to ILI and describe the viral symptoms
- Come to the school as soon as possible to pick up your child when the school calls indicating that he/she is presenting with ILI symptoms

Instructions to Personnel

- Teach children to use respiratory hygiene (i.e. covering their mouth and nose with a tissue or their sleeve when coughing and/or sneezing, followed by hand washing), washing their hands often using soap and water, and keeping their hands away from their eyes, nose and mouth are very important to protect themselves and to stop the spread of the virus
- Supervise the class when students are washing their hands with soap and water, at least twice a day
- Observe students vigilantly, check for ILI symptoms every morning and immediately report to the principal those who present with ILI symptoms
- Wash toys at least once a week
- Stock classrooms with tissues
- Watch students when using alcohol-based detergents

Instructions to Custodians

- Continue emptying trash cans daily
- Continue washing washroom floors, sinks, counters and toilets daily
- Continue stocking washrooms with paper and soap daily
- Continue emptying the recycling bin weekly
- Wash the surface of student and teacher desks daily
- Wash taps, switches, door handles and railings daily
- Sweep classroom floors every Tuesday and Thursday, or more frequently if required
- Wash classroom floors on a cyclical basis, but at least once a month
- Use the same disinfectants as usual

Instructions to Principals

- Monitor vigilantly student absences
- Isolate promptly and mask students who become ill with ILI until such time as the parents can pick them up
- Call the parents as soon as possible and insist that pick up their sick child
- Do not permit students who are ill to travel by school bus; exceptionally, these students should be seated by themselves and cover their mouth and nose with a mask or tissue
- Do not authorize sick students to return to school if they present with ILI symptoms and that for a period of seven (7) days; they should only return once they are symptom free and able to fully participate in daily programs
- Buy alcohol-based detergent, masks for the sick and tissues
- Report staff and student illness above normal absenteeism levels to local public health officials

Instructions to School Board

- Buy hand detergents and install dispensers in strategic locations, i.e. K-3 classrooms, gymnasium, entrances, staff lounge, portable classrooms, infirmary, and other areas as needed

Note that the Public Health Agency of Canada does not recommend:

- The use of masks in school settings
- The use of special disinfectants
- The generalized closure of schools

For further information, contact HealthLink Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) before visiting a doctor, medical clinic or hospital emergency room. To read the complete document by the Public Health Agency of Canada, see: Public Health Guidance for Child Care Programs and Schools (K to grade 12) regarding the Prevention and Management of Influenza-Like-illness (ILI), Including the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza Virus

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1/interim-provisaires0819-eng.php>

Beyond the above-stated measures we will be undertaking in schools, the fact remains that the most important thing you can do to assist us is **not send your children to school if they are ill.**

We share your feelings with respect to your children's health and we will continue to take all appropriate and recommended means to ensure that our schools remain safe and clean environments protected from the H1N1 influenza. If the situation changes, you will be promptly informed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Lemire', written in a cursive style.

Henri Lemire
Superintendent of Schools