

**March 12, 2020**

**Re: MHPSD response to COVID-19**

Dear families,

We appreciate your time, as this is a detailed letter with information that all families need to be aware of. In a press conference today, the Alberta Medical Office of Health provided specific recommendations to Albertans. In a response to this information, we want families to be aware of the following.

- [March 12, 2020 – MOH Press Conference](#)

We have received many considerate inquiries from concerned families, asking questions about our response to COVID-19. It is our main priority to provide safe, caring and welcoming environments for students and staff in all our facilities. While the risk remains low, we have implemented measures for the prevention and control of respiratory viruses. We understand our students, staff, and families may have questions about COVID-19. We encourage you to refer to official sources such as [Alberta Health Services](#) for the latest information. We strongly urge that you follow the advice of Alberta Health Services to prepare.

Students and staff who are ill with respiratory illness symptoms (fever, cough, fatigue, and/or muscle aches) are to stay home from school. If your child is not feeling well, we ask that you keep them home so that they can rest and recover. As always, remember to inform the school of the absence.

#### **WHAT TO EXPECT FROM MHPSD**

As with any seasonal flu and respiratory infections, there are precautions that we can all take to stay safe and healthy. While the Medical Officer of Health for Alberta informed us today that there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Medicine Hat region at this time, we are closely monitoring the situation and will follow advice and direction from Alberta Health Services and the Medical Officer of Health. It is wise to be prepared when health risks arise, and this communication is intended to inform and assist families to be proactive and take appropriate measures.

#### **PREVENTION**

Cleaning for health continues to be a top priority in all MHPSD locations. Custodial staff use disinfectants that are approved by Health Canada for institutional use (hospitals, schools, etc.). The cleaning agents used by custodial staff are known to be effective in killing coronaviruses.

Since November 2019, custodial staff have been enhancing daily cleaning and disinfection using an electrostatic sprayer (Clorox Total 360). This system is used extensively in operating rooms and other settings where health safety is a priority; as an effective method of quickly and effectively disinfecting hard and soft surfaces with no safety concerns to the occupants.

Resources: All staff are being provided with information and resources for pandemic training developed by the World Health Organization.

## HEALTH INFORMATION

Alberta Health Services has a dedicated web page to provide information about COVID-19 which can be accessed in the link below.

- [COVID-19 Alberta Health Services](#)

***If you or your child or someone in your home has a compromised immune system, please contact 811 or call your doctor for medical advice on how to protect against illness.***

## HAND HYGIENE

Washing hands with soap and water is the most effective method for removing germs. If sinks are not available, use alcohol based sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol. It is important to note that when hands are visibly soiled, alcohol based sanitizers may not be effective at eliminating viruses. You can find more information on hand hygiene as well as posters on how to properly handwash in the links below.

- [Hand Hygiene Information](#)
- [How to Handwash Using Soap and Water](#)
- [How to Handwash Using Alcohol-based Hand Sanitizer](#)

Students and staff in the school setting should clean their hands:

- Before leaving home and on arrival at school
- After using the bathroom
- After breaks and sporting activities
- Before food preparation
- Before eating any food, including snacks
- Before leaving school

If you have a younger child, support them at home by supervising and assisting in hand hygiene. In schools, instruction will be provided by staff. We are enhancing our communication to students about hand washing, sneeze/cough etiquette, and preventing illness.

## FOOD SHARING

Students should not share food, utensils, dishes, and water bottles or drink containers. Although this practice is important to prevent exposures to allergens, it is equally important to reduce virus transmission between children.

## RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze and use a tissue or flexed elbow to prevent the spread of respiratory illness. Dispose of tissues in a plastic-lined waste bin and ensure hand hygiene is performed immediately following.

- [Cover Your Cough Poster](#)

REMINDER: Masks are not recommended for individuals without symptoms. Surgical masks may not effectively prevent transmission of viruses and can increase risk of infection with improper use and

disposal. On children, masks can be irritating and may increase eye/face touching, which increases the risk of infection. Children who have symptoms should be kept home from school rather than relying on masks.

Although this is a continuously evolving situation, at this time the current risk level is low. We will continue to diligently monitor the situation and are positioned to respond effectively if directed by the Medical Officer of Health.

## **TRAVEL**

All international, national and provincial school trips and exchanges have been cancelled. These difficult decisions were made to protect students and employees from unnecessary risk of exposure and the possibility of quarantine or self-isolation, either overseas or upon their return to Canada. We have already begun to communicate with staff and students who have travelled to hot zones or communities with confirmed COVID-19 cases. We ask that individuals contact their doctor or 811 for medical advice before returning to work or school.

Decisions regarding travel remain the responsibility of families. The COVID-19 situation is evolving rapidly with increasing global spread, so it is important that people have up-to-date information to inform these decisions. All Albertans are encouraged to visit <http://www.alberta.ca/COVID19> or <http://www.ahs.ca/covid> for guidance around prevention, testing and other useful information.

## **EVENTS THAT OCCUR OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL SCHEDULE**

Based on recommendation from Alberta's Medical Officer of Health we will be postponing or cancelling all events that involve members of the public until further notice. Normal operations of the school will continue. From today until further notice, all schools will follow the guidelines for the postponement and/or cancellation of events:

- Events that include students and staff at the school MAY continue. This includes events such as after school clubs, practices, etc. Schools with locally scheduled field trips (as defined by Administrative Procedure 720: Off Site Activities) may continue as planned.
- Where the combined population of students and staff is over 250, school wide assemblies will NOT be permitted. Assemblies MAY be permitted when the combined population of students and staff is under 250 individuals.
- Events that expand to include populations from other schools and/or parents or other community members shall be postponed until further notice. This includes events such as parent teacher interviews, school athletic competitions and events, drama/musical performances, etc.

We understand that many people have scenarios that raise important questions. Please be aware that we continue to work directly with AHS and commit to sending you timely updates as decisions are made in consultation with Alberta Health Services.

It is our immediate priority to focus on the health and safety of everyone that we serve. Please check the [mhpsd.ca](http://mhpsd.ca) website and social media for updates on our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please contact your school administration with any questions.

**Be well, Mark Davidson, Superintendent**

