

March 14, 2020

Dear Families,

Representatives from Alberta school boards, school authorities and education stakeholders in Alberta participated in a teleconference today with the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), Dr. Denna Hinshaw. **Schools will be open Monday, March 16.** A comprehensive guidance document was provided to support schools and child care centres to reduce opportunities for the transmission of COVID-19. While the risk remains low, we will implement and support operational practices in order to reduce the risk of transmission of respiratory illness, including COVID-19 in MHPSD schools. This direction is from the [Alberta Guidance for Schools and Child Care Programs](#) document provided by the CMOH.

- 1) Enforce **strict hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette** and keep hands away from face and mouth.
- 2) Social distancing: reduce the amount of close interactions between students, such as moving desks so they are farther apart and revising high interaction activities such as physical education.
- 3) **Enhance cleaning and disinfecting of objects and high touch surfaces** (e.g. door handles, water fountain push buttons) will help prevent the transmission of viruses.
- 4) **No 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 students.
- 5) **Keep families informed** about measures we are taking in schools: families are a major source of comfort and reassurance to their children. We will update families regularly and inform on the steps we are taking to protect students and prevent the spread of respiratory infections.
- 6) **ZERO TOLERANCE for staff/student sickness in schools:**
 - a. **Students:** Teachers and school staff will closely monitor their classrooms, and if any student has a respiratory or flu like symptom (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, fatigue, headache, muscle aches and other symptoms that may seem like a mild cold) they will be removed from the environment and a family member will be contacted to bring them home. Children with any symptoms of illness need to be kept home and families are asked to notify the school. Students that exhibit symptoms after school will not be permitted to use school bus transportation and will need to be picked up.
 - b. **Staff:** Any school staff member that is exhibiting a symptom of illness will be asked to stay home, otherwise they will be sent home from school by the administrator. Any school staff member that develops illness symptoms during the work day will be asked to go home. **There will be zero tolerance for sickness at work.**
- 7) We will continue to enforce the **public gathering restrictions** and limit mass school activities.
- 8) **Travel:** Effective March 12, staff/students returning from any country outside Canada must self-quarantine for 14 days even if symptoms are not present and monitor symptoms.

- a. Some students/staff may be asked to **self isolate** (stay at home) for 14 days if they are at a higher risk of developing the disease (for example, due to close contact with a case). Others at lower risk of developing the disease may be asked to **self monitor** daily for 14 days for symptoms, and alert public health officials if they do develop symptoms. Individuals who are self monitoring may attend and work in a school and participate in regular activities.
 - b. Individuals are asked to call 811 if they have any symptoms of COVID-19.
- 9) **Psychological considerations:** A new virus such as COVID-19 can create anxiety and be difficult for children to understand, especially if someone in their school or family is sick, or if they see or hear of troubling information around them. Teachers and staff will work together to create calm environments where students can ask questions and get support. It is our priority to focus on the health and safety of everyone that we serve, by creating warm, welcoming and safe environments.
- a. For mental health support, please call the 24 hour Mental Health Help Line 1.877.303.2642. Helpful advice on how to talk to kids about COVID-19 can be found at alberta.ca/COVID19

We will continue to focus on **zero tolerance for sickness in schools** in combination with preventative measures, such as good hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and social distancing to reduce the spread of respiratory illness. We urge families to refer to official information sources for medical advice on illness and travel outside of Canada from [Alberta Health Services](https://alberta.ca/COVID19).

We continue to receive many important questions from families and most often about why schools are staying open. While schools remain open at this time, families have every right to keep their children home from school if they choose. Families are asked to advise the school when children will stay home. (For additional information from the CMOH about school closures please watch the [March 14, 2020 press conference](#))

This is a rapidly changing situation and we appreciate the patience and trust of our school communities as we navigate this pandemic. We will continue to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Schools will be open Monday, March 16.**

At any point, please visit the mhpsd.ca website, as this web page will be updated as significant changes occur 24 hours a day, seven days per week.

Be Well,

Mark Davidson, Superintendent of Schools

Medicine Hat Public School Division