

Memorandum

February 6, 2020

Dear Alberta school staff and parents/guardians of school children,

Subject: Novel coronavirus

I am writing to give you updated information on the novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) – a new virus that causes respiratory illness.

We know that Albertans, including school staff and parents, are concerned about this particular coronavirus. It is important to remember that the current risk to Albertans is low. **There are no confirmed or probable cases of the 2019-nCoV in Alberta at this time.**

Because this is a new virus, information can change as we learn more. For the most up to date information, go to the Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services websites:

- www.alberta.ca/coronavirus
- www.ahs.ca/ncov

Our knowledge of the 2019-nCoV continues to grow as new information becomes available, and this new evidence informs adjustments to our public health advice and actions. Although there is uncertainty on the issue of “asymptomatic transmission” (if an infected person can spread the virus before they get sick and start coughing, etc.), it is unlikely to contribute much to the spread of the virus. The highest risk of virus spread would be from a person who has symptoms like fever and cough.

Alberta and other provinces are providing advice based on the best current evidence and guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada. Please read the following information for recommendations that apply to you and your family.

Have you or your family been in Hubei province, China in the last 14 days?

If **yes**, we recommend the following:

- It is best for anyone who traveled from Hubei to self-isolate (stay at home, not going to school, work, or social gatherings), even if you are feeling well, until 14 days have passed from your last visit to Hubei province. See the information sheet on self-isolation for details.
- This advice is focused on travelers returning from Hubei province as the risk of community transmission is currently the highest in this part of China.
- You should also closely watch for symptoms like fever, cough, or difficulty breathing in any family member who has been in Hubei province in the last 14 days, and call Health Link 811 if any of these symptoms begin.

Have you or your family returned from any other parts of mainland China (outside Hubei province) in the last 14 days?

If **yes**, we recommend the following:

- Anyone who traveled to mainland China in the last 14 days should monitor themselves daily for symptoms like fever or cough (with students getting help from their parents) up to 14 days after their last visit in China.
- If, while you or your family members were in mainland China, you or your family members were in contact with someone who was diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, or were in a health care facility, please call Health Link 811 to talk about your possible exposure and to get information on any other measures you may wish to take.
- Although the most likely cause of symptoms like fever or cough is a common virus, like influenza, if someone who traveled to mainland China in the last 14 days feels sick, they should stay home and away from others, and Health Link 811 should be called to talk about any need for testing and follow up.

We are still in influenza season in Alberta, so to minimize spread of any respiratory virus, for all families we recommend the following:

- Make sure everyone in your household washes their hands with soap and water often. If soap and water are not readily available, you can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer, if hands are not visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Use a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw it in a garbage bin lined with a plastic bag. Wash your hands immediately after that. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve.
- Stay home if you're sick. If your kids are sick, keep them home from school.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are used often and shared by everyone in your home.
- Travelers should always check for current travel notices on the [Government of Canada website](#) prior to travel.

Good hygiene practices that help prevent colds and influenza will also reduce the risk of exposure to 2019-nCoV. Masks can be very important in certain situations. When sick, wearing a mask helps prevent us from passing on illnesses to other people. That is why we ask people who have a cough or respiratory symptoms to wear a mask and clean their hands when visiting an emergency department or clinic. If you are healthy, medical masks are not recommended as they don't provide full protection and can create a false sense of security.

We ask that you do not make assumptions about the risk of others having novel coronavirus based on their ethnicity or country of origin. Alberta has no confirmed or probable cases of 2019-nCoV and the current risk of exposure in Alberta is extremely low. If you have further questions, call Health Link 811.

It is natural that we worry about new threats to our health, and the best thing you can do if you are worried is to get information from reliable sources such as Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the World Health Organization. You can also take the preventive steps outlined above, like hand washing regularly, to reduce your risk of infection.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Deena Hinshaw', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Deena Hinshaw, BSc, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCP
Chief Medical Officer of Health