



Education

K-12 Education Division
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March 13, 2020

To: Superintendents of School Divisions
Directors of First Nations Education Authorities
Student Services Administrators
Principals of First Nations Schools
Principals of Funded Independent Schools

Dear Colleagues,

We know that the rapidly evolving situation around COVID-19 has been challenging to plan for and that you are fielding many questions and concerns from parents and students. This letter summarizes current information, planning underway and where schools and families can get more information.

Classes

The decision has been made to suspend classroom teaching in schools effective March 23, 2020 for three weeks, including the week of spring break. This will allow time for families, educators and school divisions to plan for alternative arrangements while the number of presumptive and confirmed cases remains low. Suspending in-class learning is a proactive response to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to prepare schools to the greatest extent possible.

Planning is underway for schools to provide as much continuity as possible in the education of students by preparing materials and exploring tools to deliver education remotely. We continue to monitor and assess the situation and changes will be reported and planned for accordingly.

While students are in classes, schools should implement social distancing practices to the extent feasible and possible. Please consider what schools and students can reasonably do to help curb the spread of the illness. For more resources on COVID-19 prevention and control in schools, please visit: www.gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus/public.html.

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Travel

As of March 13, 2020, Public Health is advising Manitobans to consider avoiding travel. For more information about COVID-19, including those traveling abroad and seeking guidance on returning to school/work, please visit: www.gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus.

Staying home when sick

Schools should ensure that staff and students who are ill stay home, regardless of recent travel. For the most up-to-date recommendations from Public health officials in Manitoba regarding self-monitoring and self-isolation, please visit www.gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus/.

Schools should continue to follow public health protocols for reporting illnesses, rely on advice from the regional health authorities and ensure adherence to the Personal Health Information Act (PHIA). Public health officials are responsible for reporting new positive cases of COVID-19.

Large gatherings

To prevent further spread, cancellation of large gatherings and public events is recommended. For schools, this includes sporting events, assemblies, and other events that create crowded situations. Consider virtual gatherings or postponing events to a later date.

Prevention is key

COVID-19 can spread through close contact with an infected person who is coughing or sneezing, as well as from objects contaminated with the virus. Public health officials are also reminding all Manitobans of important prevention measures including:

- Washing hands regularly with warm water and soap for at least 15 seconds. If soap and water are unavailable, and if hands aren't visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand cleanser may be used.
- Covering mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing, or coughing/sneezing into sleeve.
- Avoiding close contact (within two meters/six feet) with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing or sneezing.
- Refraining from touching mouth and nose.
- Cleaning frequently touched surfaces and objects.
- Staying home when sick.

Manitoba officials continue to monitor information from the Public Health Agency of Canada and the World Health Organization. For up-to-date information and resources, please visit the following websites:

- World Health Organization: www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019
- Government of Canada: www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/guidance-schools-childcare-programs.html
- UNICEF: www.unicef.org/media/65716/file

Please visit the Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living website (MHSAL) www.gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus/public.html for up-to-date information, factsheets, and commonly asked questions. These materials are updated regularly. You are encouraged to print, post, share updated materials. www.gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus/public.html.

We will keep you updated as this situation evolves. If you have public health related questions, please contact Health Links at 204-788-8200. If questions arise related to education policy, please call the Education Administration Services branch at 204-945-6899 or email EASAdministration@gov.mb.ca.

Sincerely,



Dana Rudy
Assistant Deputy Minister
K-12 Education Division

- c. Honourable Kelvin Goertzen, Minister of Education
Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools
Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre
Manitoba First Nations School System
Manitoba School Boards Association
Manitoba Teachers' Society