

**March 28, 2021**

**RE: Vancouver Island School Districts and Coronavirus Response**

**Dear Families and Staff,**

The Vancouver Island region has been experiencing a higher number of coronavirus cases in the past few weeks, and many of these cases have reported higher numbers of social contacts and events while infectious. Accordingly, we are now seeing the number of children with coronavirus on the rise.

This past few weeks may have been quiet as schools have been heading into or returning from spring break. However, all signs indicate that there will be significant numbers of exposures at schools in the weeks to come. As families prepare for children to return to school, please consider:

If your child has even mild symptoms, do not attend school, make an appointment to get your child and any other symptomatic family members tested, especially if you have travelled during spring break.

Call 1-844-901-8442 (daily 8:30 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.) to book an appointment for a COVID test.

**Remember:**

- Hand washing, physical distancing and mask wearing are important measures to continue to decrease transmission.
- Masks are not required for all children at school during this time, but may add an additional layer of prevention against transmission. If children are able to wear a mask, consider the use of masks as an additional measure at any time, including while at school.
- Students and staff should also consider continuing to wear masks whenever indoors, even if seated apart from others in the same room or outdoors but in close proximity to others.
- Stay home if unwell. Arrange testing, and do not return to school until symptoms have resolved.
- Reduce the number of social contacts and activities to reduce the likelihood of transmission.
- Continue to promote adherence to the provincial public health orders around indoor and outdoor social gatherings and avoiding non-essential travel.

When a coronavirus positive diagnosis is made in a school age child who attends school while they are infectious, the school and public health work to notify and isolate contacts of the case for 14 days. Public Health recommends a case and their close contacts must isolate to decrease transmission of the virus to friends and family. To respond to the increased number of exposures in the schools in our community, the school districts have undertaken:

- Enhanced cleaning of school environments and strengthening signage and guidance in schools to prompt distancing.
- Adoption of the new February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021 guidance for schools from the B.C. Centre for Disease Control.
- Enhanced symptom monitoring, absenteeism reviews, and heightened public health measures, including offering testing to school community members, where appropriate.

Public health urges community members to decrease social contacts and remain vigilant to illness. It is important to get children tested if they are not feeling well, even with mild illness. Children will often have only mild coronavirus illness, and symptoms that may be overlooked. Please consider having your child tested if their symptoms are new, call 1-844-901-8442 to book an appointment (daily 8:30 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.).

We know that schools offer very significant health and wellness benefits, physically, socially, and emotionally. We are working hard to ensure school environments remain COVID safe, to keep Island children in school. Thank you for doing your part to ensure our school community has fewer school exposures by having your child tested if newly symptomatic, and by limiting your social contacts.

The School District Superintendents and the school leadership teams have been working closer than ever with Public Health to respond to the increased number of school exposures. The Vancouver Island COVID-19 Rapid Response Team has been positioned to better prepare Island School Districts to respond to the pressures of the pandemic, and to better protect the school environments and ensure sustainability of the educational system in the face of growing coronavirus rates.

Huy ch q'u (Thank you),



Sandra Allison, MD, MPH, CCFP, FCFP, FRCP  
Medical Health Officer, Central Island



Dee Hoyano, MD, FRCPC  
Medical Health Officer



Scott Saywell  
Superintendent, Rapid Response Team



Piet Langstraat  
Team Lead, Rapid Response Team