



EICS Fact Sheet 4 - Parent and Community – March 15, 2020

Dear EICS community,

We apologize for the length of this messaging, but given the complexity and importance of clear communication regarding the risk of the COVID-19 Pandemic, **we strongly urge you to read this information in its entirety.**

We thank you for your ongoing understanding and cooperation as we continue to work together to ensure the safety of our students, staff and families.

In addition to this document for parents/guardians, a comprehensive handbook has been developed and distributed outlining these directives to all Elk Island Catholic Schools staff.

After direct consultation on March 14, 2020 from Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta Chief Medical Officer of Health, and Alberta Education, all schools and school division facilities have been directed to adhere to the following:

Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health Directs All Alberta Schools to Remain Open

"What is important to know is that school closures are not universally agreed on as an effective intervention to prevent spread. In some other provinces that have chosen to close schools, they have not taken the other aggressive measures we announced yesterday.

"It should be noted that the World Health Organization does not recommend school closure as the only way to prevent spread in the age group of young children. Instead, they also offer a safe schools checklist which describes the ways that school environments can be kept as safe as possible for students, teachers and staff.

"Given the current situation in Alberta, the fact that any school closure would need to be in place for months, not weeks to be effective, and the fact that students may still be at risk of spreading infection in other settings besides schools, I have advised that school closures not be implemented at this time.

"To be clear, schools, daycares and post-secondary institutions can remain open."

— Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta Chief Medical Officer of Health, statement Friday, March 13, 2020.

Zero Tolerance Directive Regarding Student and Staff Illness

Parents/guardians of students/children and staff should be informed that by the direction of Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health there is zero tolerance for children or staff with any respiratory symptoms attending schools or school division facilities across Alberta. This includes Elk Island Catholic Schools.

Any student or staff member with respiratory symptoms, such as a cough, mild cold, or flu-like symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, and including symptoms that may seem like a mild cold) **must inform the school immediately and remain home for 14-days while they monitor their symptoms.**

In the home, parents are urged to closely monitor their children for possible respiratory symptoms such as cough or symptoms of a mild cold, or flu-like symptoms. This is crucial, as students with symptoms can then be identified early and remain home, before riding the morning bus, or being dropped off at school. **Again, if symptoms are present in a student, they must remain home for 14-days while those symptoms are monitored.**

Teachers and school staff are urged to closely monitor their classrooms, and if any student is having respiratory symptoms such as cough or symptoms of a mild cold, or flu-like symptoms the steps below should be followed. The same steps should be followed if a staff member begins to experience respiratory symptoms.

- If a student, child or staff develops respiratory symptoms while at school, they should be removed from the school environment.
- Schools and school facilities promptly separate the student/child or staff with symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, and including symptoms that may seem like a mild cold) in an area separate from others, with adequate supervision until they can go home.
- To help prevent transmission, the most important steps are to reinforce strict respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene practices and to have the ill student/child or staff stay two meters away from others. If possible, the student should be placed in a separate room from other students/children with a closed door. Any rooms they have been in while symptomatic should be cleaned and disinfected before others enter them.
- Schools must notify parents/guardians if their child begins to experience respiratory symptoms while at school and arrange for immediate pick up.
- **Students and staff must remain home for 14 days, regardless of changes in symptoms over that time.** If symptoms have improved, parents must contact the school to update the school upon the end of the 14 day period.

- If symptoms persist past the 14-day period, please consult with your school before your child returns.

Since younger children and children with special needs may not always be able or willing to identify or disclose symptoms, they should be closely monitored by staff for symptoms.

Students or staff returning from travel outside of Canada

Parents/guardians of students/children and staff are informed that by the direction of Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health that, as of 3:30 pm March 12th, **any student or staff member who returns from travel outside of Canada must contact the school to notify of their return, and as directed by Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health, self-isolate for 14-days before returning to school or school division facilities.**

During self isolation, monitor for the development of any possible symptoms. If possible COVID-19 symptoms do develop, please notify Alberta Health by phoning 811.

If students or staff are tested for COVID-19, those who test negative will be advised individually by AHS about return to school and work.

Important Considerations:

- If your family is planning travel outside of Canada for March Break, and that travel includes an EICS student, that student will have to self-isolate for 14-days starting upon your return home. **The student WILL NOT be able to return to school until that 14-day self-isolation expires.**
- If parents or family members have travelled outside of Canada, but your child or a related staff member has not, Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health advised that the child and staff member can still attend school or work. If any symptoms develop they will then be subject to the same 14-day period away from school and school division facilities.

Large Gatherings

Until further notice, the following events should be cancelled:

- Events with more than 50 attendees that involve international participants, critical infrastructure staff, seniors, or other high-risk populations, such as immune compromised individuals.
- Large events with more than 250 attendees, including sporting events, school assemblies and community events.

School administrators will be taking steps to ensure that no more than 250 people are in the same room at any given time.

Proper Hygiene and Precautions

A new virus such as the COVID-19 can create anxiety and be difficult for students/children to understand, especially if someone in their school or family is sick, or they see or hear troubling messages on the radio, internet or television. It is normal for students/children to feel worried or nervous and have questions. All staff in schools and parents at home can support children by doing the following:

Reassure students/children about their personal safety and health. Telling students/children that it is okay to be concerned is comforting. Reassure them they are safe and there are many things they can do to stay healthy:

- Hand washing: Wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer, especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Cough/sneeze etiquette: Cough and sneeze into arm or tissue.
- Stay home when sick: Students/children should tell parents if not feeling well.
- make a plan to stay home from school.
- Keep clean: Keep hands away from face and mouth.
- Stay healthy: Stay healthy by eating healthy foods, keeping physically active, getting enough sleep.

As referenced in previous communication, additional sanitation measures have been taken across all schools, division facilities and EICS Transportation vehicles. These measures include:

- Our custodians have increased their cleaning and sanitizing practices at all schools and sites and transportation vehicles in Elk Island Catholic Schools and buses.
- Custodians are sanitizing all high-touch areas in our schools to help prevent the spread of germs
- Custodians will wipe down/sanitize door hardware, handrails, drinking fountains, telephones in common areas and other high-touch areas as they move throughout their schools

NOTE: Enhanced sanitizing is planned over the March Break by EICS staff.

Actions to be Taken if there is a Confirmed Case of COVID-19 in a School

School and Division administration will continue to work closely with local public health officials to determine the best course of action for schools. That includes close collaboration on decisions about facility closures or cancellation of large events.

IMPORTANT: Alberta Health has directed that schools are not expected to make decisions about closure or cancelling events on their own.

This is generally done under the direction of local public health officials in collaboration with the sites that are impacted. Schools and Division facilities can determine what events may need to be cancelled and seek specific public health guidance in advance about precautionary measures for these events.

If an ill student or staff member attended school prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case

- AHS or public health officials, depending on the location, would conduct contact tracing of the case and in consultation with the Medical Health Officer, inform decisions about appropriate public health measures for staff and/or children/students that were at risk of exposure, including instructions about self-isolation (staying at home) or self-monitoring. Local health officials will work directly with the school/school authority administration to determine the best course of action and this may or may not include a school closure.
- Local health officials may recommend temporary school dismissals if a student or staff member attended school prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case. AHS Public Health recommendations for the scope (e.g., a single school, a full district) and duration of school dismissals will be made on a case-by-case basis based on the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 and information about cases in the affected community.
- Schools should work with the local Public Health department and other relevant leadership to communicate information about the possible COVID-19 exposure appropriately. In such a circumstance, it is critical to maintain confidentiality of the child/student or staff member. EICS has had daily contact with our AHS zone office and will continue to do so.
- If a child/student or staff member has been identified with a case of COVID-19, school administrators will receive guidance from AHS Public Health about when students and staff should return to schools and what additional steps are needed for the school community. In addition, children/students and staff who are well but are taking care of, or sharing a home with, someone with COVID-19 will receive instructions from public health officials as to when they can return to school/child care and other follow-up instructions (e.g., enhanced cleaning, disinfection and hygiene practices).