Edmonton, March 10, 2020

To all families,

In recent weeks, the spread of a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has affected many parts of the world and the first cases have now occurred in Alberta. This morning, the CSCN learned that one of our parents from École Notre-Dame in Edmonton might have been in contact with someone carrying the coronavirus. As a precaution, the parent has self-isolated. As a precaution, children in this family will not attend school in the upcoming days. It is important to note that the parent has not received confirmation for a positive case of COVID-19. The parent is taking precautionary steps and we wanted to keep you informed.

What is coronavirus?
Coronaviruses are part of a large family of viruses that usually cause mild respiratory illnesses such as the common cold or the flu. Some coronaviruses have caused more serious illnesses, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle Eastern respiratory syndrome (MERS). COVID-19 is a disease of a new coronavirus that was first identified in humans in December 2019.

What are the common symptoms of COVID-19?
Symptoms of coronavirus are similar to those of influenza (flu): mild to severe breathing problems with fever, cough, and shortness of breath. It takes 2 to 14 days after a person contracts the virus to experience symptoms. However, we are learning more every day about the symptoms of COVID-19 and how it is spread.

How does the virus spread?
Most often, it is spread from person to person via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, in a similar way that influenza and other viruses and infections are transmitted. These droplets can be inhaled by people nearby. It is currently unclear whether a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object infected with the virus and then touching their mouth, nose or eyes. Often, with most viruses, people are considered the most contagious when they are the most symptomatic.

8627, rue Marie-Anne-Gaboury (91 St.), bureau 322, Edmonton, Alberta T6C 3N1
Tél. : 780 468-6440 / Téléc. : 780 440-1631 / conseil@centrenord.ab.ca
centrenord.ab.ca

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What will schools do to prevent coronavirus or other infections?
Beyond the hygiene measures already in place, schools will increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched objects and areas. Staff will remind students of some simple rules that will limit the spread of COVID-19. These include:

- show children the coughing and sneezing etiquette and the correct handwashing techniques
- supervise students while they wash their hands with soap and water (at least twice a day)
- observe children on arrival: report immediately to school administration those who have flu, cold or other symptoms
- supervise students when using alcohol-based disinfectants
- supply the class with tissues
- ask parents to keep the children at home if they are sick

What should you do as parents?
This virus can be spread from person to person very rapidly and that is why we ask you to take precautions with your children to limit the risk of infection in our schools. To minimize the risk, we ask that you continue to follow preventive measures:

- stay home if you are sick; keep your children at home if they have symptoms and contact the Health Link 811
- make sure all family members are washing their hands with soap and water frequently. If soap and water are not available, the use of an alcohol-based disinfectant is recommended
- avoid touching your face with your hands
- sneeze, blow your nose or cough into a disposable tissue and discard the tissue immediately into a bin. Wash your hands immediately afterward. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands
- clean and disinfect regularly all surfaces and areas frequently used and touched by family members at home
- have a plan in case your child has to stay home
- inform your school administration if you plan to travel outside the province in the next few days or weeks (spring break) or if you have recently stayed abroad

Alberta Health does not recommend closing schools. We remain in regular communication with the authorities on the health measures that have to be taken. We will send you these as soon as they are made available.

Further information can be found on the Alberta Health website:
https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.asp

Regards,

Robert Lessard
Superintendent

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