



OFFICE OF THE CHIEF PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

March 6, 2020

To: Schools, and Day Home/Day Care Operators
School Staff, Parents and Students

RE: Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and Other Respiratory Illnesses

This letter is to update you on coronavirus disease (COVID-19). We know that NWT residents including school staff, students, and parents are concerned.

Currently, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in NWT is low. As of March 6, 2020, no one in NWT has developed COVID-19. There are, however, other illnesses such as pertussis (whooping cough) and influenza circulating.

From a report of over 70,000 people with COVID-19 in China, we know that most people who get sick (about 80%) have a mild sickness. Only a small amount of people who became critically sick in China were under age 19 since children typically develop a much milder sickness. Children, however, may still get sick or pass COVID-19 to those who are at higher risk for more severe illness, including older adults, people with chronic diseases, or people with weakened immune systems.

The NWT Office of the Chief Public Health Officer is working closely with our national partners to protect NWT residents. Importantly, this involves testing individuals who return from travel with symptoms of COVID-19, and monitoring others.

1. If you or your family have recently travelled outside of Northwest Territories:

- Students/families returning from travel outside the NWT who have not visited Iran or Hubei Province, China should monitor themselves for symptoms like fever, cough, or difficulty breathing for 14 days after their return from travel. If anyone develops symptoms, they should inform their healthcare provider ahead of time so they can arrange a visit. When you arrive at a health care facility, you will be asked to wear a mask so you can protect others.
- Students or families who visited Iran or Hubei Province, China in the last 14 days should self-isolate for 14 days since their last day in those regions, even if they are feeling well. Self-isolation means staying home and not going to school, work or social gatherings. If you or a family member develops fever, cough, or difficulty breathing during your self-isolation, call a healthcare provider ahead of time so they can arrange a visit.

2. If you are planning international travel:

- Many families are planning trips outside of Canada in the next several weeks. The global COVID-19 situation is changing quickly, and traveling may increase your risk of exposure to COVID-19.

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Stay up to date with Government of Canada travel alerts <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html>

or here for real time

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

- Ensure your immunizations are up to date, and that you received any necessary immunizations for the country you are travelling to. Although there is no vaccine for COVID-19, this will help reduce your chances of getting other disease while on your trip. Travel immunizations require advance planning with your local public health unit or health centre.
- During travel:
 - wash your hands regularly,
 - avoid contact with animals (dead or alive),
 - avoid surfaces with animal droppings or secretions on them,
 - avoid close contact with sick people,
 - be aware of the local health situation,
 - follow local public health advice.

3. General advice to prevent infections

- We recommend that all families follow healthy respiratory practices (see attached posters):
 - a. **STAY HOME** if you are sick (if you child is sick make sure to keep them home)
 - Wear a mask if you are sick and must go out especially if you are in a waiting room or in places with large crowds.
 - If you need to see your healthcare provider ask for a mask when you get there
 - b. **Avoid close contact** with others if you are sick
 - c. **Turn and cover your nose/mouth** with a disposable tissue for every cough/sneeze
 - If a tissue is not available cough/sneeze into your elbow
 - d. **Throw used tissues in the garbage**
 - If there is no garbage, carry a small plastic bag to put used tissues in and throw out later
 - e. **Wash your hands frequently.**
 - Wash them after coughing or sneezing, if they are dirty, using the bathroom, or before eating.
 - Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based sanitizer if water is not available.
 - f. **Clean/Disinfect any surfaces or objects** you or someone else might have touched while sick
- While there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19, vaccines protect against other infectious diseases. Please see the [NWT Immunization Schedule](#). Ensuring your immunizations are up to date before travel or participation in large sporting or cultural events can prevent serious infections like pertussis or influenza. To find out your immunization status or to book an appointment for immunizations call your [public health unit or local community health centre](#).

4. General advice for schools, and day home/day care operators

- **Individual level**
 - Practice social distancing when ill.
 - Ask parents to keep children home who exhibit cold and flu-like symptoms.
 - Encourage staff to refrain from coming to work if they have cold and flu-like symptoms.
- **Handwashing**
 - Encourage all students to keep unwashed hands out of their mouths, eyes, etc.
 - Encourage all students to use soap to wash hands for at least 20 seconds
- **Classroom/School/Daycare level**
 - Have staff review hand-washing techniques with students.
 - Discourage the sharing of food and drinks.
 - Soap is preferred especially if hands are visibly dirty. If soap is not accessible use alcohol-based sanitizer.
 - Encourage maintenance and staff to use effective cleaning products on all high-touch surfaces daily.
 - Increase frequency of cleaning by maintenance staff and upgrade via the use of more effective cleaning products.
- **System/District level**
 - Ensure that your staff are vigilant in monitoring the student body, especially in cases where students exhibit symptoms associated with the virus.
 - Establish a process for determining whether students and daycare children are contracting the virus and a system for reporting updates to health officials.
 - Share overall school strategies for dealing with the spread of the virus should school/district be impacted.
 - Our Office is not recommending the use of masks in school or daycare settings.
 - At this time, our Office is not recommending that schools cancel classes or daycares close. Refer to your policy on school or daycare closure should closure or dismissals become necessary.
 - Take action without stigmatizing any students/families/populations.
 - If you have planned out-of-district trips overseas where there are reported outbreaks at the destination, consider cancellation.

Finally, the global COVID-19 situation is changing quickly and it is important to prepare in case you or a family member get sick. This may include preparing supplies such as food or medications. Here is a link to some recommendations from the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/being-prepared.html>

For the most up-to-date information, visit the COVID-19 section of the Department of Health and Social Services website: <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>. This website also links to important Government of Canada sites.

If you have further questions or concerns about COVID-19, you may call the Government of Canada's information line at 1-833-784-4397. You can also contact your health care provider.

Sincerely,



Dr. Kami Kandola, MD, MPH, CCFP, FCFP,
ACBOM, DTM&H
Chief Public Health Officer

Attachments (3):

- Health Respiratory Practices Poster:
<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/healthy-respiratory-practices.pdf>
- Handwashing Poster:
<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/handwashinginfographicbig-web.pdf>
- COVID-19 Handout
<https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/coronavirus-disease.pdf>