

Dear Parent or Caregiver,

We are working closely with the Chief Medical Officer to prevent the spread of the H1N1 virus in Island schools. The H1N1 virus is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to the seasonal influenza (fever, cough, runny nose, sore throat, body aches, fatigue and lack of appetite.)

The Public Health Agency of Canada has guidelines for schools, child care centres and post-secondary institutions. They include recommendations for handwashing and disinfecting surfaces, isolating the ill, and reporting outbreaks to public health authorities. The guidelines are available at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca. Schools can play an important role in pandemic prevention and response. We are making a concerted effort to educate students, identify and isolate students with symptoms, and monitor the transmission of the virus.

Handwashing - Students are receiving information on good handwashing practice. They are asked to clean their hands often. Hand sanitizers are available for the use of visitors.

Cough Etiquette - Students are asked to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough or sneeze, or to cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve and not their hands.

Cleaning - Procedures are being followed to clean high-touch areas in schools.

Surveillance - The Department of Health is monitoring the rate of student absenteeism as one way of measuring the transmission of the virus. Every school must now report attendance on a daily basis. It is very important that you inform the school when your child is absent. You must let us know if your child has influenza-like symptoms. And you must contact the school early in the day as the Chief Health Officer needs this information by noon.

How can you help at home?

Ask your youth what they know about H1N1 - Ask them what they know, so you understand what you need to tell them.

Review Hygiene - Show children how to wash their hands. Make sure they know how to cough and sneeze into their elbow. Discourage them from sharing food, beverages and other items.

Keep Common Surfaces Clean and Disinfected - Keep personal items separated from members of the household who are displaying flu-like symptoms. Use a disinfecting cleaner to reduce germs. Emphasize the importance of not sharing personal items.

Create a Quarantine Plan - Make an alternate child care plan in advance. If your child has to stay home due to the flu, have some activities planned as a change in a child's routine can be stressful. Check with your child's teacher. Older students may be able to keep up with school work from home. Find out in advance what sick leave and compassionate leave policies your employer has in place. For more information on flu prevention, visit www.fightflu.ca or call 1-888-748-5454.

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