

ILLNESS and COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Background

The existence of communicable diseases requires Divisions to establish procedures with regard to the management of students and staff who may have or be exposed to a communicable disease. Such procedures reflect both the preservation of public health while protecting individual rights and freedoms.

The Division is committed to the humane treatment of students and staff who have a communicable disease within an environment that protects the health and safety of all students and staff and respects the dignity of those concerned.

Procedures

1. MyHealth.Alberta.ca is a website that was built by the Alberta Government and Alberta Health Services. This website can be used by schools and school communities to obtain general information about the various communicable diseases.
2. Anything related to a specific case or management of any communicable disease should be facilitated through Alberta Health Services. The School can contact the local Community Health Center/Public Health office to speak to a Public Health Nurse or call the Communicable Disease Control unit at 403-955-6750.
3. Should it be identified that notification needs to be sent home with students this is to be coordinated by *Alberta Health Services* with the School and School Division. School staff are to notify the Superintendent of any notification.
4. Students who may have a communicable disease will be respected by staff, including the confidentiality of records.
5. The privacy of students who have a communicable disease will be respected by staff, including the confidentiality of records.
6. Information about communicable diseases will be provided to students as part of the regular instructional program as specified within the *Alberta Program of Studies* and related Curriculum Guides.
7. Employees who have a communicable disease shall be allowed to continue normal duties unless:
 - 7.1 The job of the employee requires that the employee be free from any communicable diseases.
 - 7.2 In the opinion of the local Medical Health Officer, special circumstances dictate otherwise; or

8. The privacy of employees who have a communicable disease will be respected and their identity will remain confidential.
9. Employees who are unable to continue their duties as a result of having a communicable disease shall have full access to sick leave, long-term disability, and other medical benefits provided for by the various collective agreements and benefit plans.
10. Procedures for dealing with employees who may be exposed to a communicable disease will be consistent with *Occupational Health and Safety* requirements as outlined in Appendix A.
11. In the event that an employee indicates that s/he has a communicable disease, the supervisor shall immediately contact the Superintendent or designate to review procedures to be followed.
12. If, in the opinion of the attending physician, an employee who has a communicable disease is no longer capable of working, the matter will be supported in the same way as other illnesses that impair an employee's capacity to work.

Reference: Relevant Legislation & Guidelines
Alberta Health Services: Guide for Outbreak Prevention and Control in Schools (September 2022)

ILLNESS and COMMUNICABLE DISEASES PRECAUTIONS

Families, parents, students, staff, and schools have an important role in helping control the spread of illness in schools. Schools are responsible to help protect the health of students under their care and staff working in their facilities. Alberta Health Services (AHS) works collaboratively with schools to prevent disease transmission. This includes preventing the spread of respiratory, gastrointestinal (GI), rash, and any other unusual illness identified within the school.

Schools take the following measures to help prevent outbreaks and keep students and staff safe including:

- Implement practices to minimize the risk of transmission
- Implement protocols to identify and manage individuals (students and staff) with symptoms of illness
- Promote personal hygiene practices
- Promote environmental cleaning in collaboration with the school division and the custodial services provider
- Track the number of ill students as well as the symptoms reported by parents/guardians and communicate this information to Alberta Health Services
- Collaborate and comply with Alberta Health Services recommendations

Important steps to take to help prevent the spread of illness and communicable diseases include the following:

- Parents/guardians should assess their children daily for symptoms of illness
- Students and staff should not attend school if they are ill
- Environmental cleaning and hand hygiene for students and staff should be promoted
- Staff and students should practice respiratory etiquette
- Students and staff can decide based on their own risk whether they want to wear a face mask

If a student or staff member develops symptoms of illness while at school

- Ill students or staff should be sent home. Parents will be contacted to pick up their ill child
- Ill students or staff should remain isolated in an area away from others while waiting to go home and may be provided with a face mask to wear (if appropriate)
- Face masks may be worn by school staff in interaction with symptomatic students

It is recommended that symptomatic students and staff stay at home until they are feeling well, and are able to fully participate in all normal school activities and reached the end of the recommended isolation period (as applicable)

- Respiratory Illness:
 - You should stay home and away from others until your symptoms have improved, you feel well enough to resume normal activities, and have been free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication.
 - If you test positive for COVID-19, the current AHS recommendations in Alberta state that one should:

- Stay home and isolate for at least 5 days from when you first started having symptoms of COVID-19 or had your positive test (if you never had symptoms). You should keep isolating until your symptoms have improved and you have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
 - You are the best person to decide if your symptoms are improving. An improvement in symptoms means that you are feeling better than you did in the previous days and you have no new COVID-19 symptoms.
 - Some symptoms may continue after you're no longer able to spread the virus to others. If you still have a cough, loss of sense of taste or smell, or fatigue that is not getting worse after 5 days of isolation, you do not need to keep staying home.
 - To further reduce the chance of spreading COVID-19 to others, you are recommended to wear a mask while indoors and around other people. You should wear a mask for 10 days after your symptoms start.
- Gastrointestinal Illness: 48 hours after symptoms resolve
 - Rash: depends on type of rash that is present

Ongoing learning sessions to educate staff and students about the control of illness and communicable diseases is to focus on research informed precautionary measures, including the following:

1. Hand Washing

- 1.1 To effectively wash hands, use plain soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer and vigorously rub together all surfaces of lathered hands for at least twenty seconds. Avoid the use of abrasive soaps and brushes.
- 1.2 Hands and any skin surface contaminated with blood or other body fluids are to be washed thoroughly as soon as possible.

2. Coughing Etiquette

- 2.1 Staff and students are to be taught proper coughing etiquette (e.g., coughing into upper sleeve rather than hands).

3. Use of Protective Clothing and Equipment

- 3.1 Employees must use disposable gloves to handle or clean up blood and body fluids.
- 3.2 Hands are to be washed after gloves are removed.
- 3.3 Waterproof coverings are to be used on open cuts or sores.

4. Clean up of Blood and Body Fluids

- 4.1 Contaminated surfaces must be disinfected. Surfaces may be disinfected with an appropriate agent.
- 4.2 Mops and cleaning rags must be disinfected and rinsed with an appropriate agent.

5. Laundering of Clothing and Linen

- 5.1 Clothing and linen soiled with blood or other body fluids are to be laundered in as hot water as the material will allow. If necessary, soiled articles may be rinsed in cold water prior to laundering.

6. Disposal of Contaminated Waste

- 6.1 Contaminated waste must be secured in a sealed double plastic bag before discarding with routine garbage.
- 6.2 Sharp objects, such as broken glass that may be contaminated with blood, are to be discarded in sturdy puncture-proof plastic or metal containers (such as an empty coffee can) with a firmly fitting lid.
- 6.3 Local fire departments may be able to dispose of contaminated waste, particularly used needles.

Reference: Relevant Legislation & Guidelines
Alberta Health Services: Guide for Outbreak Prevention and Control in Schools (September 2022)

LIST OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Administrative Procedure 161 – Appendix C

(Sample letters can be accessed by contacting the Superintendent or designate who can provide these via Alberta Health Services.