

Education
August 26, 2009

Minister Outlines Plans for H1N1 Virus as Schools Prepare to Re-open

With a new school year beginning and the presence of the H1N1 influenza virus in the province, the Department of Education and the province's five school districts, in consultation with the Department of Health and Community Services, are assisting individual school communities in building awareness, providing information and promoting basic infection control practices to help prevent or limit infections from occurring in schools.

"It is important that school administrators, teachers, staff, students and parents have access to timely, relevant information that is in keeping with the direction and advice from provincial and national health agencies," said the Honourable Darin King, Minister of Education. "Steps are being taken to provide the information that our school communities will need to help promote and maintain healthy learning environments."

To monitor conditions related to H1N1, a Provincial School Health Action Committee (PSHAC) has been established with representation from school districts, the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Community Services. In addition, each school district will establish an H1N1 influenza committee, which will include a regional public health representative.

Several resource materials are being provided to school administrators including:

- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) to allow principals, teachers and staff to become knowledgeable about the topic and to assist them in answering questions from students and parents;
- Information brochures to be distributed to parents;
- Health information posters to be placed throughout schools;
- Suggested web-based resources, including videos; and,
- Hand-sanitizers to supplement hand washing.

Resource materials will also be posted to the Department of Education website prior to the beginning of the school year at www.gov.nl.ca/edu. The department and school districts are following the protocol for prevention provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) which promotes education and awareness around hygiene. In addition, the Department of Health and Community Services advises that prevention remains the most effective measure to help protect against influenza. Clean, Cover and Contain is the recommended approach.

Members of school communities are encouraged to practice the three Cs:

- **Clean:** wash hands thoroughly and often with soap and water or hand sanitizer
- **Cover:** cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or arm as opposed to the hands which frequently touch other surfaces and people
- **Contain:** if you are sick, you should stay home so the illness is not spread to others

The Department of Education will continue to work with school districts as they finalize district and school specific plans to promote prevention or respond to outbreaks once the school year is underway.

"School district personnel have been working diligently to prepare for the beginning of the school year and every effort will be made to raise awareness in each of our school communities about the importance of following recommended hygiene practices," said Cindy Fleet, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Directors of Education and Director of the Nova Central School District. "The use of hand sanitizers was introduced as a pilot project in four schools within the Nova Central School District and proved to be an effective tool to raise general awareness around the importance of hygiene. Their availability in schools province-wide this fall will prove to be a valuable support to frequent hand washing with soap and water."

Hygiene-related measures that will be reinforced in schools also include extra attention to the normal practice of cleaning high-traffic surfaces and keeping washrooms well-stocked with cleaning supplies.

"The health of our students and staff is paramount for both the department and school districts and we want everyone to be aware of the role they can play in school and at home to lessen any possible impact of the H1N1 virus," said Minister King. "I encourage parents, students, teachers and staff to review the materials being provided and take extra care and caution when it comes to practicing basic hygiene."

For health information related to H1N1 flu virus, visit www.gov.nl.ca/health.

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