



March 11, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians:

During the cold and flu season, we usually see an increased number of students with symptoms of influenza (flu). The flu season has been complicated by COVID-19 (novel coronavirus). Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses with common symptoms similar to the flu, which include fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. We understand you have questions about the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus). Families are encouraged to refer to official sources such as Alberta Health Services <https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>. Information is also available on the Northland School Division website www.nsd61.ca.

Prevention

There are two important ways to prevent and control respiratory viruses:

The first is for students who are ill with respiratory illness symptoms (fever, cough, fatigue, and/or muscle aches) to stay home from school. If your child is not feeling well, we ask that you keep them home so that they can rest and recover. As always, remember to inform the school of the absence.

The second way to prevent and control respiratory viruses is the consistent practice of good respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene. Good respiratory etiquette includes covering the mouth and nose during coughing or sneezing with a tissue or a flexed elbow and disposing of used tissues in a plastic-lined waste container, followed by hand hygiene. Hand hygiene is the washing of hands with plain soap and water, which is effective at removing visible soil as well as viruses.

Children in the school setting should clean their hands:

- Before leaving home and on arrival at school.
- After using the bathroom.
- After breaks and sporting activities.
- Before food preparation.
- Before eating any food, including snacks.
- Before leaving school.

If you have a younger child, support them at home by supervising and assisting in hand hygiene. In schools, instruction will be provided by staff. We are enhancing our communication to students about hand-washing, sneeze/cough etiquette, and preventing illness – including new signage and supplies at each site across the school division. If you have questions about your health, please contact your primary health provider or Health Link 811.

Food sharing

Students should not be sharing food, utensils, dishes, and water bottles or drink containers. Although this practice is important for preventing exposures to allergens, it is equally important in reducing virus transmission between children.

Psychological Considerations

A new virus such as the COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) can create anxiety and be difficult for students/children to understand, especially if someone they know is sick, or they see or hear troubling messages on the radio, internet or television. It is normal for children to feel worried and nervous and have questions.

Support your children by reassuring them about their personal safety and health:

- Limit their access to news and online stories about the issue.
- Maintain a normal routine unless otherwise advised by an authority.
- Encourage them to talk to you about their concerns.
- Reassure them they are safe.
- Advise them of steps they can take to stay healthy:
 - Wash hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (sing the ABC's to measure time), especially after coughing or sneezing.
 - Cough and sneeze into arm or tissue.
 - Stay home if they are not feeling well.
 - Keep hands away from face and mouth.
 - Stay healthy by eating healthy foods, keeping physically active, and getting enough sleep.

There's nothing more important than the safety of students. It is natural to be concerned about this situation. If we receive any additional information, we will certainly share. If you have any questions or concerns, please refer to the question and answer page on the Northland website www.nsd61.ca or contact Communications Coordinator Curtis Walty at curtis.walty@nsd61.ca or 780-624-2060 extension 6183.

Sincerely,

Name
Principal
School Name