



Update March 14, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Many parents and community members have been asking questions about whether schools will close or remain open. School divisions do not have the authority to make public health decisions. Following the recommendation from Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Deena Hinshaw, all schools and facilities in the Northland School Division (NSD) and all other school divisions in the province will remain open for regular instruction and operation until further notice. This recommendation was again restated during a teleconference with school divisions on Saturday, March 14, 2020. Previously on March 13, 2020, Dr. Hinshaw addressed the concerns raised from parents and teachers about COVID-19 (coronavirus) in schools.

“What is important to know is that school closures are not universally agreed on as an effective intervention to prevent spread. It should be noted that the World Health Organization does not recommend school closure as the only way to prevent spread in the age group of young children. Instead, they also offer a safe schools checklist which describes the ways that school environments can be kept as safe as possible for students, teachers and staff. Given the current situation in Alberta, the fact that any school closure would need to be in place for months, not weeks to be effective, and the fact that students may still be at risk of spreading infection in other settings besides schools, I have advised that school closures not be implemented at this time.”

- ***Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health***

We know that school communities are concerned with the announcement of new cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus) within the province. Alberta Health Services (AHS) is actively monitoring the situation and leading the response in Alberta. We take our direction from AHS and will continue to respond and act in-line with their recommendations. Dr. Hinshaw stressed numerous times throughout her presentations **zero tolerance for illness**. Therefore, in order to ensure and maintain safe learning environments, please note:

- If your child is sick, please do not send them to school. Call the school to report their absence.
- If your child is sick or exhibiting symptoms while at school, you will be notified to pick them up. They will not be transported on a school bus.

- AHS recommends that if you or your child have symptoms such as fever, cough and difficulty breathing and your family has travelled outside Canada or has been exposed to someone who has COVID-19 (coronavirus), stay home and call Health Link 8-1-1.

During this challenging time for everyone, NSD's Emergency Response Team has been working daily to:

- Review updates from Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services and the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- Review preventative measures that have been implemented and discuss if other measures need to be put into place.
- Northland staff are participating in training of best practices for pandemic preparation, pandemic response, and specifically the awareness and response to Covid-19.
- Our Maintenance Department will continue to work with the custodians and the principals to ensure thorough cleaning and disinfecting of high touch surfaces is taking place.
- Communicate information to staff, students, parents, and community members.
- Collaborate with other school divisions for best practices.
- Train staff in the use of the Clorox Total 360 system.

We will continue taking the necessary steps to minimize risk and keep our students and staff safe. NSD is implementing the following practices with students and staff in all school division facilities, in order to prevent the spread of common respiratory illnesses (such as influenza) as well as COVID-19 (coronavirus) whether at home or school:

- Use good hygiene practices, such as frequent handwashing.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue.
- Dispose of tissues immediately and wash your hands.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Stay at home if you are feeling ill.
- Don't share items that may have saliva on them such as drinking glasses and water bottles.
- Clean high touch surfaces such as taps, door knobs and countertops frequently.
- Limiting activities involving larger groups. In some schools, principals are implementing staggered breaks.
- Contact your primary health provider or Health Link by calling 811 if you have questions or concerns about your health.

These recommendations are supported by Alberta Health Services.

Thank you for your support as we work to help keep our communities healthy and safe. The safety and security of our students and staff is always our first priority in Northland School Division. If you have any questions or would like further information, please refer to the Northland website www.nsd61.ca or contact Communications Coordinator, Curtis Walty at curtis.walty@nsd61.ca or 780-624-2060 ext. 6183.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nancy Spencer-Poitras".

Dr. Nancy Spencer-Poitras
Superintendent of Schools
The Northland School Division