

January 29, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am writing about the recent outbreak of the novel coronavirus. Schools have received many enquiries from parents who are understandably concerned about their children's health and I felt it was important to communicate directly with our families and staff.

The Richmond School District has been working closely with provincial and local health authorities to ensure that accurate information is available and that appropriate steps are being taken by the district. Public health officials continue to make it clear that the risk of this virus within B.C. remains low and all necessary precautions are being taken to prevent the spread of infection.

We know that there are significant amounts of information about novel coronavirus available online, particularly through social media. Unfortunately, much of that information is not accurate and is causing unnecessary fear in our community. It is critical that as we make decisions, we do so with information that is current, accurate and based on medical science. Please refer to the most recent updates from Vancouver Coastal Health www.vch.ca and the BC Centre for Disease Control www.bccdc.ca.

A new toll-free phone number (1-833-784-4397) has been established to answer questions from Canadians about the 2019 novel coronavirus. Service is available from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. until January 29 and from 7 a.m. to midnight starting January 30 (Eastern Standard Time).

Health authorities have also made it clear that the best defense against any cold and flu virus is proper respiratory hygiene. This includes proper hand-washing with soap and water and covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. The school district is committed to ensuring that soap dispensers in school washrooms are kept well-supplied and that surfaces that students touch frequently are cleaned on a regular basis. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been ordered for the main entrance to every school in our district as an additional precautionary measure. Please understand that these are all preventative measures designed to keep students and staff healthy and are in no way indications that parents should be concerned about sending their children to school.

We do ask that if your child is displaying any signs of a cold or flu, such as coughing and sneezing, that you keep your child at home. Some parents have asked that schools require students who have recently arrived from China to stay at home for a minimum of two weeks. It is important to note that schools do not have the authority to make public health decisions such as requiring students to remain at home for health reasons. If any steps were to be taken in relation to a public health concern, it would be at the direction of the Ministry of Health and Vancouver Coastal Health.

The Richmond School District prides itself on its inclusive, respectful and welcoming approach. During this difficult time, it is important to remind ourselves that now, more than ever, we need to remain united as a community, doing whatever we can to care for not only ourselves, but for each other.

Moving forward, we will remain in contact with the Ministry of Health, Vancouver Coastal Health and the Ministry of Education, and will continue to provide updates to our community as they become available.

Sincerely,

Scott Robinson
Superintendent of Schools