

The B.C. Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, announced on January 28 that the first case of novel coronavirus has been confirmed in B.C. Further details from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education are available [here](#).

We understand students, parents and staff may have questions about coronavirus.

We can assure you that we are in regular communication with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and our local health authority to make public health decisions, and to ensure students and employees are kept informed and safe. We will continue to be in close contact with public health officials and, with that in mind, would ask that you do not make assumptions about the risk of students or staff based on their ethnicity or travel history.

Inaccurate information and rumours regarding coronavirus are starting to circulate on social media. We would encourage students, staff and their families to refer to official sources such as the BC Centre for Disease Control for the latest information and updates: <http://www.bccdc.ca/>

## **Reducing risk**

The BC Centre for Disease Control recommends that to reduce the risk of exposure to novel coronavirus, employ the same measures that are taken in relation to colds and flu:

- Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds using soap and hot water (it is the single most effective way of reducing infection spread).
- Practice other good hygiene habits: do not touch your face/eyes/mouth with your hands, and cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough (ideally with a disposable tissue or the crease of your elbow).
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched workspace surfaces.
- Maintain good general health (eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, exercise in moderation).
- Stay home if you are sick.
- 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).

Further information about novel coronavirus is available on the BC Centre for Disease Control [website](#).

## ***Advice for students and families considering travel***

- Students and families considering travel to and from China are encouraged to consult the Travel Health Notice (<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories/pneumonia-china>) for China on travel.gc.ca regularly, as recommendations may change over the course of your travel as new information becomes available.
- No matter where students and families plan to travel, the Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that they consult travel.gc.ca, which is the Government of Canada's official source

of destination-specific travel information. It provides important advice to help travelers make informed decisions and travel safely while abroad.

- Students and their families should always tell their health care providers about their travel history if they become ill after returning to Canada.

### ***Advice on masks from Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry***

“The thing about masks is we know that they are very important in certain situations. If I'm sick, my wearing a mask keeps my droplets in. It does help prevent transmission to other people. That's why we ask somebody who's sick, who's going to an emergency department, for example, if you have a cough or respiratory symptoms, we ask you to put on a mask and clean your hands.

“We also know that it's really important for health care workers to wear masks when they're assessing people because we're getting very close to people. We're doing things like sticking nasal pharyngeal swabs down their throat and that can make people cough. They need to wear masks and eye protection as well. We know they're very effective at that.

“Where it's not known is how effective wearing a mask in the community is when you are not sick yourself. The masks may give you a false sense of security. The most important thing that you can do in the community is to wash your hands regularly. The viruses like this need to be inhaled into your lungs -- same with influenza and RSV that we're also seeing quite a lot of here in Vancouver, and also in China, I might add. The vast majority of the people that we're seeing who have come from China who have symptoms don't have this coronavirus. They have all of the other respiratory viruses that we see this time of year. Really important is to clean your hands regularly. If you're touching something and it has droplets on it with virus in it, as long as you clean your hands before you touch your face or your mouth, you're not going to be at risk of getting that virus in your body. It's not something that comes in through the skin. It needs to get into your mucous membranes and be breathed into your lungs. That's really important -- covering your mouth when you cough so you're not exposing other people. If you are sick yourself, stay away from others. Contact your health care provider ahead of time so you can be safely assessed.”