NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services
Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

PARENTS AND SCHOOLS REASSURED ABOUT SWINE FLU

VICTORIA – Provincial Health Officer Perry Kendall is encouraging parents and schools to continue taking practical steps to prevent the spread of illness, but not to be too alarmed about the spread of the swine flu.

"At this point, the cases in British Columbia are all very similar to seasonal influenza," said Kendall. "The best thing parents and schools can do to protect children is to keep them home from school if they're sick and to continue taking common sense health precautions to combat the spread of the flu."

Schools and parents can take the following basic precautions to prevent the spread of influenza:

- Stay home when you're sick or have influenza symptoms;
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue away immediately;
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands;
- Clean your hands often with soap and warm water, or a gel- or alcohol-based hand cleanser;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth; and
- Practice other good health habits.

Today, officials have decided to close Beairsto Elementary in Vernon for the next week due to a young student who has tested positive for the swine flu. The student is experiencing a mild case and is at home recovering well.

"British Columbia has a strong surveillance system in place through its local health authorities and we will know if there are any clusters or outbreaks within the school system," said Kendall. "At this point, there are no reasons for parents or schools in other parts of B.C. to be concerned about children's health while at school."

"It's important that school districts across B.C. be proactive in reviewing with students how to wash their hands properly, with warm water and soap, in order to take precautions and help prevent the spread of any illness, influenza or otherwise," said John Gaiptman, Victoria schools superintendent. "I would encourage any parents of sick children to keep them home from school in order to assist us in continuing to provide a safe and healthy environment for all our students."

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"Parents and schools, as well as all British Columbians, can be assured that if there are any further developments and we see a need to close other schools and/or other public areas, the Province will inform everyone at that time," said Kendall.

If you are feeling ill or have more questions, you can speak to a nurse by calling HealthLink BC at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information on how to protect yourself from influenza and how to prevent the spread of the swine flu, visit www.gov.bc.ca/swineflu.

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