

School District No. 71 (Comox Valley)

Board of Education

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H1N1 and the Flu Season Update for Parents

As the flu season has begun in full swing we wanted to update parents, staff and the community about our district's stance on responding to illness and the reality of H1N1 in our schools.

We work closely with the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) and our Medical Health Officer to monitor the health of our schools. We do this through tracking the attendance at our buildings and the reasons for absence of students.

It is the flu season and, like any other year, students and staff get ill. Early in the school year, we had anticipated that we would be able to confirm or deny for parents the emergence of H1N1 in our schools through confirmation of testing for H1N1. This is no longer the case. We do not expect that VIHA will be confirming any cases of H1N1 for us because of the concern for privacy of individuals, the widespread influenza activity in the general community and that our response as a school is to be based on influenza like activity within the school environment and not the actual confirmation of the presence of any cases of H1N1.

Where children become ill and are tested, often the results are not back for over a week at which time people likely have fully recovered. In our schools it is not the presence of H1N1 that is a trigger for us to begin specific interventions, it is a rise in the level of absenteeism resulting from flu like symptoms which would indicate that the flu is spreading. The Medical Health Officer has informed us that likely during flu season there will be students with H1N1 in all of our schools.

As stated above, the Vancouver Island Health Authority monitors the attendance and reasons for absence in all of our schools. When our absenteeism jumps, then we begin to determine the cause and take steps to intervene.

Parents can help us in our processes by giving us the reason for absence of your child. Our plan from the beginning has always been to limit the spread of any virus by promoting healthy choices.

Our plans include:

- Encouraging parents to keep their children at home who have flu like illness until they are feeling better.
- Isolating students who have flu like symptoms, contacting home and arranging for transportation home;
- Asking staff members who are ill to stay home;
- Monitoring the levels of absenteeism at schools due to flu-like symptoms; and
- Increasing the cleaning routines at schools including additional cleaning of flat surfaces.

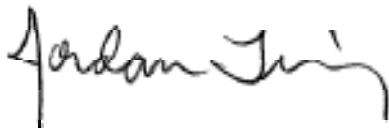
We have a wealth of resources including Frequently Asked Questions on our website. These materials can be accessed by clicking the H1N1 button on the bottom right of our website. One example of these resources is an H1N1 Symptom Checker at:

<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/h1n1.asp>

Finally, please remember that you can work to avoid the flu by taking these steps (from VIHA):

- Wash your hands regularly, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, as germs can spread that way.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you are sick, stay at home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- If you are sick, are symptomatic and have to go out in public, consider wearing a mask to prevent the spread of the flu virus.

I hope this has answered some of basic questions and given an overview of our processes.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jordan Tinney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jordan Tinney
Superintendent of Schools