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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2009EDUC0006-000250  
August 24, 2009

Ministry of Education  
Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

### **H1N1 PLANS IN PLACE FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL**

VICTORIA – The Province is preparing for a possible resurgence of the H1N1 flu virus in B.C. schools this fall with a pandemic plan that includes new information and materials for parents, students and schools, Minister of Education Margaret MacDiarmid and Minister of Healthy Living and Sport Ida Chong announced today in conjunction with provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall.

“We don’t expect that individual school closures, community-wide closures or provincewide closures will be useful in controlling the spread and impact of the H1N1 flu virus,” said Kendall. “Closures early last spring were initiated out of an abundance of caution because we had very little information on the novel flu virus at that time. It has since become apparent that the disease caused by this virus is generally mild and does not warrant such severe measures.”

In addition, the Province and the Office of the Provincial Health Officer, in consultation with the federal government and public health partners, have developed new guidelines around school closures that complement the pandemic plans of school districts.

“Though the H1N1 flu virus has proven to be similar to seasonal flu, parents should continue to take every precaution to keep their children safe,” said Chong. “We have provided information for both parents and students on the Province’s H1N1 website and we are working with our public health and education colleagues to ensure that all British Columbians are well-protected this coming flu season.”

Under the school closure guidelines, the provincial health officer and the local medical health officer will make the final decision on whether it is necessary to close schools or other facilities such as daycares or community centres.

“The Ministry of Education has developed a pandemic response framework and it will be in place for the first day of school to support operational decision-making during any pandemic,” said MacDiarmid. “The framework will also provide guidance to public and independent schools and will be available to the First Nations education system.”

The framework will assist boards of education and independent school authorities in planning for such contingencies as:

- Transportation of sick students.
- Communications protocols during a pandemic.
- Roles and responsibilities of emergency response teams.
- Continuity of instruction in the event of classroom disruptions.
- Post-pandemic recovery plans.

“We are taking proactive steps to protect the health and safety of students and staff,” said Kamloops board of education superintendent Terry Sullivan. “Co-ordinated planning and communication between government, health authorities and districts will prepare us for a worst-case scenario. However, by teaching students to take the necessary precautions and practice good hygiene, we hope to minimize the spread of illness and safeguard the health of everyone in B.C. schools.”

British Columbia continues to monitor the H1N1 flu virus situation in the province. Cases have been confirmed throughout B.C. and the vast majority of these patients have either recovered or are recovering. For the school guidelines and for the latest B.C. back-to-school and general information about the H1N1 flu virus, visit [www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1](http://www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1).

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# BACKGROUND

## GETTING READY FOR THE FALL INFLUENZA SEASON

British Columbia continues to monitor the H1N1 flu virus situation in the province. The vast majority of lab-confirmed cases in B.C. have been mild, with the patients either having already recovered or currently recovering.

### **How H1N1 influenza is transmitted**

The H1N1 flu virus, like other influenza viruses, spreads mainly through the coughing or sneezing of a sick person. It may also be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with the virus and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Young children, pregnant women, and people with chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease may be at higher risk for complications from this infection.

### **Symptoms**

In most children, the symptoms of the H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of regular flu. They include:

- Fever.
- Cough.
- Sore throat.
- Body aches.
- Headache.
- Chills and fatigue.
- Occasionally, vomiting and diarrhea.

### **Preventative measures**

There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that can cause respiratory illnesses like the H1N1 flu virus:

- Teach your children to wash their hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Teach your children to cough and sneeze into a tissue or into the inside of their elbow. Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Teach your children to stay at least two metres (six feet) away from people who are sick.
- Children who are sick should stay home from school and daycare and stay away from other people until they are feeling better and able to fully participate in normal activities.

### **If your child is sick**

While the majority of H1N1 cases in B.C. have been relatively mild, it is important to take proper precautions:

- Unless they need medical attention, keep children who are sick at home. Do not send them to school or daycare until they are feeling better and able to fully participate in normal activities.

- If your child needs to see a doctor or health-care provider, call ahead and report your child's symptoms.
- Have them drink a lot of liquid (juice, soups, Pedialyte®).
- Keep the sick child comfortable. Rest is important.
- For fever, sore throat, and muscle aches, you can use fever-reducing medicines that your doctor recommends based on your child's age. Do not use aspirin with children or teenagers.
- If someone in your home is sick, keep them away from those who are not sick.
- Keep tissues close to the sick person and have a trash bag within reach for disposing used tissues.

### **School closure policy**

Based on the experience to date about the current H1N1 situation, public health officials in B.C. do not anticipate that closures of individual schools, community-wide closures, or provincewide closures will be useful for controlling the transmission and impact of H1N1.

### **Vaccine**

Canada is working on an H1N1 vaccine, which will be made available as per national guidelines when it is ready. Once the vaccine arrives in British Columbia (expected in November), people will be able to get immunized at their doctor's office or at an immunization clinic set up especially to deliver the vaccine. Consultations are underway that would allow pharmacists to deliver vaccinations as well.

### **Antiviral medication**

Those in high-risk categories (pregnant women, young children and people with underlying health conditions such as asthma, diabetes and morbid obesity) should visit their doctor prior to the fall to determine whether they should be prescribed antivirals in advance, for use in the event they show H1N1 flu symptoms.

You can call [HealthLink BC](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca) at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day/seven days a week to speak to a nurse if you have more questions or are concerned about any illness/symptoms experienced by you or your children.

For the latest facts on the H1N1 flu virus, including back-to-school information, visit [www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1](http://www.gov.bc.ca/h1n1).

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