Northern BC Healthy K to 12 Schools Newsletter

ISSUE 8 | SPRING–SUMMER 2025

Information for Northern BC schools, students, and families

northern health
the northern way of caring

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Using QR codes

In this newsletter, we use QR codes for various websites and resources. Here are steps to help you:

- **Step 1:** Open the Camera App from your mobile device (either on the home screen, control centre, or lock screen).
- **Step 2:** Hold your device so the QR code opens in the viewfinder and wait until you see a notification pop up with a link.
- **Step 3:** Click on the notification to open the link associated with the QR code.

Truth and Reconciliation

Territory acknowledgment

Northern Health (NH) acknowledges with gratitude that our work takes place on the territories of the Tlingit, Tahltan, Nisga'a, Gitxsan, Tsimshian, Haisla, Haida, Wet'suwet'en, Carrier (Dakelh), Sekani (Tse'khee), Dane-zaa, Cree, Saulteau, and Dene Peoples.

Photo: Dunes in Tow Hill Ecological Reserve, Naikoon Provincial Park, Territory of the Haida Nation

People and partnership acknowledgment

We recognize the 11 Métis Chartered Communities, as well as the Inuit and Urban and Away from Home Indigenous peoples on these lands. We are thankful for the continued opportunity to work in partnership to optimize the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples whom we serve.

Commitment statement to Truth and Reconciliation

NH acknowledges the harms experienced by Indigenous peoples accessing the health system. We are committed to new ways of being, through building healthy and trusting relationships with Indigenous communities, families, individuals, and employees. These commitments are interwoven throughout the strategic priorities and are integral to the success of NH.

For more information on NH's commitments visit NH's strategic plan.

Indigenous health and cultural resources

The Indigenous people of Canada are inclusive of three diverse groups that include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. The use of Indigenous is intended as an inclusive commitment to improving health outcomes for each group.

NH Indigenous Health

Indigenous Health walks alongside Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and communities we serve, as well as organizations, staff, and physicians in the North to strive for excellence and culturally safe care to uphold Indigenous people's rights to self-determined health and wellness.

Visit NH Indigenous Health for more information.

Assembly of First Nations (AFN) digital education toolkit

Check out the new It's our time AFN education toolkit.

- It is the basis of a comprehensive strategy to reach out to First Nations students, teachers, schools, communities and the Canadian public at large. It consists of 22 learning modules that have been designed to enhance the understanding of important First Nations topics to ensure both students and teachers are learning in and out of the classroom.

The National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health

National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health

The National Collaborating Centre for indigenous Health (NCCIH) is a national Indigenous organization established in 2005 by the Government of Canada and funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to support First Nations, Inuit, and Métis public health renewal and health equity through knowledge translation and exchange. The NCCIH is hosted by the University of Northern BC (UNBC) on the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh in Prince George, BC.

Browse NCCIH knowledge resources on child, youth, and family health topics.

Feature story

Stay Afloat: The importance of swimming for safety

As summer break gets closer, you might dream about spending time at the lake or pool, staying cool, and having fun splashing in the water with friends and family. Swimming is not only fun and good for your health; knowing how to swim can save your life!

Did you know that the 2023 British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey found that:

- Only around 6 in 10 (60%) of northern youth (ages 12-19) feel confident swimming?
- About 29% can swim but aren't confident?
- 7% can't swim at all?

This is worrying because drowning can happen quickly and quietly. It's important to always have a confident and sober swimmer watching children and less confident swimmers when they are in or near water.

Get ready for water adventures this summer by making sure you and the children and youth in your life learn to swim or at least learn some basic swimming skills. Public pools can be limited in the north, and even if your community has one, it can be hard and expensive to get formal swimming lessons. Some schools help by including swimming lessons in their physical education and health classes, which is great!

If swimming lessons aren't available to you this year, there are basic swimming skills you can learn by practicing. Also, it's just as important to know and follow basic water safety rules:

- Always swim with a buddy; supervise children.
- Don't dive into unfamiliar or shallow water; always enter feet first.
- Don't push or jump on others in the water.
- Use life jackets when around open water, even if you know how to swim.
- Stay sober and alert in, on and around the water.
- Be ready for emergencies:
  - Learn CPR and first aid **or,**
  - know how to get help from an adult **or**,
  - call 911.

For more information on swimming safety and drowning prevention:

Child safety: Preventing drowning | HealthLink BC

WaterSmart Courses | Drowning prevention |The Lifesaving Society BC

Swim to survive

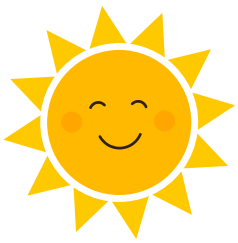
Swimming ability alone isn't enough: A new approach to water safety • Sport for life

For all schools

NH services and resources

Healthy schools help to protect the health and safety of our children and youth in the North. For an overview of the current NH services that are available to schools, visit the NH School and youth health webpage.

If you or your family need to connect with a health care provider, contact the health unit in your community.



NH offers a variety of services for families with school-age children and youth.

Communicable disease follow-up

- Support for cases and/or outbreaks of infectious or contagious illness. Examples include pertussis (whooping cough), and meningitis.

Immunizations

- Kindergarten/school entry (4-6 years of age), Grade 6, and Grade 9.

Environmental health

- The School Act gives authority to Medical Health Officers (MHOs) for school inspections, and MHOs delegate inspections to Environmental Health Officers (EHOs).

Health promotion and education

There are a variety of topics and resources to support school curriculum including:

- Legal substances
- Injury prevention
- Mental health and wellness
- Nutrition and healthy eating
- Physical activity
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Support for children with potentially life-threatening medical conditions
- Support for substance use, including harm reduction supplies

For more information on Population and Public Health Supports, Northern Health support for schools 2024/2025
Note: Some services may vary from community to community, and school to school.

Healthy Communities E-Brief

The NH Healthy Communities E-Brief is a monthly newsletter, created by the NH Healthy Communities team. It includes resources, events, and funding opportunities to help improve health and well-being in Northern BC. To subscribe, send a blank email to healthycommunities@northernhealth.ca with “subscribe” in the subject line.

School-aged immunizations

It is important to be up to date on all childhood immunizations.

You can access your child's immunization records through Health Gateway or by contacting your local health unit. (see previous page for the local health unit link and QR code).

Kindergarten / school entry

- Children entering Kindergarten need the following 2 booster vaccines, and any other childhood vaccinations that may be overdue.

Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis, Polio (Tdap-IPV) Vaccine BC Health File

Measles, Mumps, Rubella and Varicella (MMRV) Vaccine BC Health File

Grade 6

- Children in grade 6 need the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines series. This consists of 2 doses, given 6 months apart.

Grade 6 Immunizations in BC Health File

Kids Boost Immunity Lesson Plan: How to Handle Your Vaccines Like a Champ (Grade 6)

Grade 9

- Children in grade 9 need booster vaccines for Meningococcal Quadrivalent (Men C-ACYW-135) vaccine and Tetanus/Diphtheria/Pertussis (Tdap).
- Additionally, HPV vaccine will be offered to those who have not received it yet or have an incomplete HPV vaccine series.

Grade 9 Immunizations in BC Health File

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine

Several northern communities have been selected for a HPV vaccine catch-up campaign as part of a provincial initiative to help eradicate cancer in British Columbia. The HPV vaccine is safe and protects against various cancers caused by HPV infection.

Myth: 11 and 12 years old is too young to vaccinate against HPV.

Fact: Preteens make more antibodies after getting the vaccine than older teens or adults. This provides long-lasting protection against HPV.

Myth: The HPV vaccine is not effective at preventing cancer.

Fact: When given at a young age, studies show the HPV vaccine is nearly 100% effective at preventing infection of the most common types of HPV that can cause mouth and throat cancer, cervical cancer, anal cancer, vaginal and vulvar cancer and penile cancer.

Myth: Most people show signs or symptoms of HPV.

Fact: Most people infected with HPV do not show any signs or symptoms and can pass the virus on to others without even knowing it.

? For questions related to the HPV vaccine, you can call the NH Virtual Clinic at 1-844-645-7811 and you will be connected with a HPV Trusted Voice nurse expert.

You can also scan the QR code or visit **immunizebc.ca/vaccine/hpv** for more information about the HPV vaccine.

Resource for students with needle-phobia

School Staff Toolkit: CARD resources for children and youth with needle phobia – CARD system is an evidence-based practice that supports students to develop a coping strategy to manage their fear and anxiety during vaccination injection pain.

Nutrition

New BC School Food Toolkit

The BC Ministry of Health has released the BC School Food Toolkit.

This toolkit is for anyone making food purchasing decision for school food programs. It is a website with resources and suggestions for feeding kids in schools, such as:

- Recipes, sample menu plans, and easy-to-use food lists
- Tips for feeding kids with diverse needs
- Food allergies and intolerances
- Serving Indigenous foods and cultural foods
- Food safety information

It is voluntary and aims to create a supportive school food environments that allows students to eat and learn well. This includes fostering a culture of care and connection around eating experiences.

To learn more or to explore opportunities for staff training, connect with the Regional Dietitian Lead for School-age Nutrition at PopHthNutrition@northernhealth.ca.

Physical activity

Sign up your school for GoByBike week!

GoByBike Weeks offer a fun way to finish the school year, and then welcome everyone back again for the following year! Upcoming important dates:

Spring: May 31-June 6, 2025

Fall: September 27-October 3, 2025

GoByBike BC has everything you need to sign up your school and promote the event. The more participants your school has, the more greenhouse gases you will save, and the greater your chance of winning great prizes. Registration dates/links are updated in the weeks preceding each event.

Environmental health

Cleaning and disinfecting for schools

Handwashing is the best defense against spreading infections. Encourage students to wash their hands after using the bathroom and before every snack and meal.

Visit the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) webpage to learn more about how to perform hand hygiene. Regular cleaning and disinfection can help prevent the spread of communicable diseases.

Illness prevention

Winter may be over, but germs are still in our environment! This is a friendly reminder that you can get sick in the Spring and Summer as well. Here are a few things you can do to keep you and your family safe:

- Take care of yourself by **eating well and getting enough sleep** so your immune system is in top condition.
- **Wash your hands well** with soap and water after you go to the bathroom and before you eat, prepare food, or touch your face.
- If you are ill, stay home so you **don't share your germs with anyone else**.

For more information, read the Quick Guide to Common Childhood Diseases

Travel safety

Planning an out-of-town trip during summer vacation? There is lots to think about aside from booking flights or hotels.

- What foods and water will be safe to consume?
- Are additional vaccinations recommended?
- What can you bring to make your trip more comfortable and enjoyable?

To learn more, visit
Health advice for travelers | HealthLink BC

Mental wellness

Supports and resources for school communities and parents

BC Children's school mental health promotion team, Kelty Mental Health resource centre, and Compass Mental Health program offer a variety of free services, supports and resources for school communities, including parents, across BC.

Check out their webinars, podcasts, videos and more!

Additional mental wellness topics and resources

For school professionals

The Health Promotion and Schools team supports district-level champions and community partners that work with school communities by providing resources, professional learning and consultation.

For counsellors and community care providers

Compass Mental Health connects community care providers across BC to the information, advice and resources they need to provide timely and appropriate mental health and substance use care to children and youth close to home. Compass is a great resource for school counsellors and mental health clinicians, especially those in rural and remote schools.

For parents and caregivers

BC Children's Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre provides mental health and substance use information, resources, and parent peer support to families across BC.

Injury prevention

AdventureSmart

Get ready to be an adventurer with BC AdventureSmart's "Pack Like a Pro – Essentials for Outdoor Adventures!" videos! Whether you're going for a short hike or a longer adventure, these 10 short, fun animated videos show you the important things you need for any outdoor trip. From first-aid kits to maps, these ideas teach you and make you feel ready to explore the outdoors safely.

With BC AdventureSmart, you'll always be ready for nature! Let's "Pack Like a Pro!"

How do you know if you have suffered a concussion?

(Hint: you don't have to lose consciousness or hit your head).

Did your body or head get hit in a way that quickly moved your head or neck? Things like a fall, a car crash, or taking a hit while playing sports could cause concussion/head injury.

Use the concussion awareness tool to check symptoms and learn what to do! →

CATT online also has great courses for parents or caregivers, school professionals, youth, athletes, and more to learn how to recognize, respond and manage concussions. Check it out!

Does your child play sports? Protect their teeth and mouth with a mouthguard!

Mouthguards are necessary in any sport where there might be a strong chance of contact with other participants or hard surfaces, and are also a good idea for recreational activities.

Sports-related dental injuries are common among children and adults and can have long-term consequences. Injuries range from tooth loss to lacerated gums to jaw fractures. Mouthguards help protect against trauma to the teeth, gums, soft tissues and supporting bones.

Your mouth guard should cover either your upper or lower teeth and gums (depending on which arch the guard was made for) and fit so that your jaws are properly aligned. It should also be light, but strong, and easy to clean.

For more information on types of sport mouth guards and how to care for them visit: Public EducationBCDA (scroll down to "General Oral Health - Mouthguards")

For secondary schools

Stay safe and focused on the road! 🚗 😊

If you're looking at your phone, you can't see the road. Anything that takes your attention away from driving can cause distracted driving. Even when you're stopped, checking your phone affects your focus. You're 3.6 times more likely to crash if you're using your hand-held phone.

If everyone in B.C. avoided distractions while driving, we could save around 78 lives every year. Let's make our roads safer together! Turn off notifications and keep your phone out of sight.

Stay safe and stay focused! Visit Distracted driving | ICBC

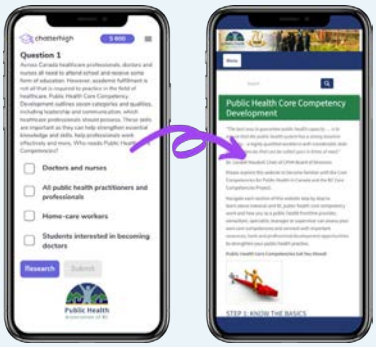
ChatterHigh

ChatterHigh is a gamified student engagement platform designed to deliver supplemental curriculum remotely or in the classroom. Our Mindful Module activity includes focused content on health, career pathways, financial literacy, and other essential future-planning topics.

Some exciting Mindful Modules are currently available to students in BC including:

- Understanding Public Health in BC
- Connect to Careers in Care with BC Emergency Health Services
- British Columbia Mental Health Resources

For a full list of available activities visit our library and click here to create your account!



Indigenous youth-led support: We Matter Campaign

The We Matter Campaign is a national, multi-media initiative that helps Indigenous youth in Canada. It collects positive messages from people across the country to give hope and encouragement to Indigenous youth who are facing challenges. The campaign is led by Indigenous youth and aims to promote life, hope, and support. They offer resources like a Youth Toolkit, which includes videos and other materials to help Indigenous youth navigate difficult situations.

It's Okay to Get Help

Smoking and vaping

Toolkit for Schools

NH's web page offers useful resources about smoking and vaping for educators, parents, guardians, and young people.

QuitNow youth mini site

QuitNow launched a mini site for young people who vape and want to quit or cut down.

The mini site offers information and interactive activities on the health risks of vaping, the benefits of quitting, and ways to cope with addiction and mental well-being.

Visit QuitNow:
Your Vape-Free Life

Tobacco and vapour enforcement program

NH's Tobacco and Vapour Products Enforcement Program makes sure stores follow provincial legislation about selling tobacco and vapour products. In BC, it is illegal to sell tobacco and vapour products to anyone under 19 years old.

To ensure retailers follow this law, NH hires minor test shoppers (MTS) aged 16 to 18 as casual employees. MTS are supervised by Tobacco and Vapour Enforcement Officers and conduct about 1,000 compliance checks each year with retailers who sell tobacco and vapour products. These checks are done approximately 3 times per year at locations such as:

- grocery stores
- convenience stores
- department stores
- drug stores
- 19+ vapour stores
- gas stations

Youth can search for open positions by region and apply online. MTS should be detail-oriented, reliable, good at communicating, and able to work well with others. This position is a great opportunity for youth to develop skills, gain work experience, and contribute to the health of youth in northern BC communities.

MTS positions are posted on NH's Careers website.

Harm reduction

Foundry BC

Foundry is a province-wide network of integrated health and wellness services for young people aged 12-24 years.

Young people can access free and confidential services by:

- Walking into one of our 17 local Foundry centres
- Exploring our online tools and resources at foundrybc.ca
- Connecting virtually through the free Foundry BC app (for communities without a physical centre)

Northern BC Foundry Centres are located in:

Prince George
1148 7th Ave V2L 5G6
236-423-1571
foundryprincegeorge@bc.ymca.ca

Terrace
101 – 3219 Eby Street
250-635-5596
foundryterraceinfo@tdcss.ca

Coming soon to:

- Burns Lake
- Fort St. John

Foundry Virtual BC

For communities that do not yet have a Foundry centre, FREE virtual services are available and include:

- counselling
- peer support
- groups and workshops
- physical and sexual healthcare
- work and education services

Hours of operation: 7 days a week.

- Monday to Friday 10:00 am to 9:00 pm
- Saturday to Sunday 10:00 am to 6:00 pm

Questions? Email online@foundrybc.ca

PreVenture® Program

Foundry is expanding their support of the PreVenture Program with schools across BC! This program is an evidence-based initiative aimed at promoting mental health and reducing substance use among youth. They uses personality-focused workshops to equip students in grades 7 to 9 with skills to handle:

- Stress
- Peer pressure
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Identity development.

The PreVenture Program has shown significant success, delaying substance use initiation and reducing its prevalence by up to 80%. It also helps reduce:

- Anxiety
- Depressive symptoms,
- Suicidal ideation among youth.

For the past two years, Foundry has been supporting schools across BC in implementing this program, providing comprehensive support including training for staff, ongoing coaching, and covering participation costs.

To learn more about how your school or district can get involved:

- Visit Foundry support available for schools
- Reach out directly to prevention@foundrybc.ca

Naloxone kits

Save a life! Carry a naloxone kit. Protect your friends by getting trained to recognize an opioid poisoning (overdose) and how to respond. Using a naloxone kit is easy to learn and they're free for those who might witness an opioid poisoning or be risk of an opioid poisoning.

You can get trained at your local health unit and pick up a kit. It's confidential!

Training is also available on Toward the Heart.
Naloxone course | Toward the Heart

McCreary Centre Society

Youth engagement, employment, and grant opportunities

McCreary Centre Society (McCreary) is probably best known for their BC Adolescent Health Survey which has been happening in Grade 7-12 classrooms across the north every 5 years since 1992, in partnership with local Public Health Resource Nurses and allied health professionals.

Did you know McCreary also employs local young people in a range of roles?

Youth Health Ambassadors

The Youth Health Ambassadors program trains and supports youth to host conversations with their peers about topics that impact youth health like:

- mental health
- school food
- climate change

Youth are paid an hourly rate for the work they do and are expected to attend virtual meetings with other youth across BC.

To learn more about becoming a Youth Health Ambassador, email evelyn@mcs.bc.ca.

Provincial Youth Advisory Council

The BC Health and Wellness Youth Advisory Council (BC YAC) is facilitated by McCreary and advises the BC Ministries of Health and Education on youth health issues.

The council is currently focusing on vaping in schools but will also be supporting the ministries to address other youth health issues. The council meets monthly and gets together in-person once a year.

Youth are paid an hourly rate and have their travel expense covered.

High school students who are interested in joining the council should contact katie@mcs.bc.ca.

Youth Action Grants available for youth-led projects across the North

McCreary's Youth Action Grants are available to youth aged 12-19 who want to do a project which supports youth health in their school or community.

Grants of up to $750 are available!
Applications must be supported by at least one adult (e.g., a teacher or youth worker).

Examples of recently funded projects include:

- Eve's Bakery (a catering project created by students in Prince George to raise money for the Red Dress Society and raise awareness about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women).
- A student-built school greenhouse in Toad River.
- An equestrian therapy program and movie club in Coast Mountains.

For more information about the YAG program and to download an application, please visit McCreary Centre Society: Youth Action Grants.

Previous issues

Issue 7 - Fall/Winter 2024

Issue 6 - Sping/Summer 2024

Issue 5 - Fall/Winter 2023

Important contact information

If you need to speak with a health care provider:

- Call your family doctor or nurse practitioner.
- Connect with your local health unit.
- Check out the NH website for more information.

Here are some more options for you and your family:

Connect with the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day

Call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1

Contact the Northern Health Virtual Clinic at 1-844-645-7811

#HealthyNorth

northernhealth.ca

HealthySchools@northernhealth.ca

10-420-6194 (FF09458–IND–05/25)

northern health
the northern way of caring