

August 23, 2019

**To: Superintendents of Public Schools and Independent School Authorities**

**Re: Supports provided to schools by Northern Health**

---

Schools are among the most influential settings for the development of long lasting health behaviours, life skills, and self-esteem among children and youth.<sup>1</sup> Northern Health has a shared interest with school communities to help students stay healthy and safe. In this letter, we would like to outline the supports that Northern Health provides to schools in Northern BC. Please distribute to all schools under your authority as appropriate.

### **Health Promotion**

Evidence from British Columbia and Canada shows there is substantial room for improving behaviours of children and youth in regards to many health issues, including: physical activity, nutrition, obesity, body image, bullying, mental health, stress, anxiety, dental health, injuries and substance use/misuse (e.g. vaping, tobacco, cannabis, alcohol and other substances).<sup>2</sup>

Northern Health staff can support schools with health promotion initiatives and programs that will enhance student's health and well-being in the 2019/20 school year. For information on the supports available, see **Northern Health Supports for Schools** on our website at <http://bit.ly/nh-supports-schools>.

### **Mandatory reporting of immunizations for school children and youth**

Starting this school year, the Province is implementing a mandatory reporting requirement through the Vaccination Status Reporting Regulation.<sup>3,4</sup> This means that parents and guardians of Kindergarten to Grade 12 age students, who appear to be under-immunized or not immunized, may be contacted by Northern Health to provide immunization records or the opportunity to catch their child up on immunizations at a clinic in their community. Mandatory reporting is part of an ongoing plan to increase immunization rates for all vaccine-preventable diseases. Reporting provides Health Authorities with up to date records and increases Northern Health's ability to respond to an outbreak by allowing health professionals to quickly identify individuals that are not up to date with their immunizations.

---

<sup>1</sup> Alberta Health Services, Population and Public Health (2012). "Framework for the Comprehensive School Health Approach" Available online: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/school/csh/if-sch-csh-ahs-framework.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> International Union for Health Promotion and Education (2010). "Promoting health in schools: from evidence to action" Available online: [https://dashbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Promoting\\_Health\\_in\\_Schools\\_from\\_Evidence\\_to\\_Action.pdf](https://dashbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Promoting_Health_in_Schools_from_Evidence_to_Action.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> British Columbia Gov News (2019). "Immunization status reporting next step in ongoing effort to protect against outbreaks" Available online: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019HLTH0079-001366>

<sup>4</sup> HealthLinkBC (2019). "Vaccination Status Reporting Regulation" Available online: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/vaccination-status-reporting>

## **Control of common and uncommon infectious diseases**

Clusters of common infectious diseases, such as common colds, influenza, and gastrointestinal illnesses (“stomach flu”) occasionally occur in school settings. For information on how to respond to common childhood illnesses see the BCCDC “Quick Guide to Common Childhood Diseases”<sup>5</sup>.

Remember that as of the 2017-2018 school year, Northern Health no longer requires that schools routinely report to us when absenteeism is greater than 10%. We do encourage schools to track absenteeism, and reasons for absences, in order to detect situations where increased attention to infection control may be necessary. For information on how to prevent and reduce the transmission of these illnesses, see **Ways to Prevent and Manage Communicable Diseases in Schools** on our website at <http://bit.ly/ways-prevent-manage-cd-schools>. The infection control strategies discussed in this document are generally sufficient to manage the situation.

However, should you require our assistance with these infection control strategies contact us at your convenience, or if you become concerned about a situation involving a more urgent infectious disease (e.g. measles, mumps, or pertussis), contact us immediately ([see contact information on page 3](#)). Early communication will ensure:

- Schools, students and their families receive timely and accurate health information;
- Any necessary infection control measures are implemented promptly; and,
- Northern Health is able to take additional action in the broader community, if required.

## **Other school health supports**

Fostering healthy schools involves ongoing support and open, two-way communication between the school and dedicated health professionals throughout the school year. To facilitate this, each school is attached to one of Northern Health’s local **Interprofessional Teams**. Schools can expect a member from this team to be in contact with them at the beginning of the school year. The team will support them with priorities such as:

- Routine grade 6 and 9 immunizations;
- Kindergarten health events (immunizations, vision screening, hearing testing, dental screening, and health promotion resources);
- Providing annual education and consultation for school staff around potentially life threatening illnesses such as anaphylaxis and diabetes (including glucagon administration when requested by a parent);
- Urgent and routine communicable disease and infection control issues; and
- School health promotion activities and resources

In addition to Interprofessional Teams, Environmental Health teams can provide support with regards to food safety, water, sanitation, and air quality; they also complete physical environment inspections every 3 years. They can advise on a range of topics including communicable disease prevention and emergency preparedness. Contact the Interprofessional Team member assigned to your school for further information.

---

<sup>5</sup>BC Centre for Disease Control (May 2009) “A Quick Guide to Common Childhood Diseases” available online: [http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/Other/Epid\\_GF\\_childhood\\_quickguide\\_may\\_09.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/resource-gallery/Documents/Guidelines%20and%20Forms/Guidelines%20and%20Manuals/Epid/Other/Epid_GF_childhood_quickguide_may_09.pdf)

## Comprehensive School Health (CSH)

CSH is an internationally recognized holistic approach to applying principles of health promotion in school settings. Northern Health's Regional Nursing Lead for Healthy Schools and Youth routinely reaches out to school districts about health promotion initiatives, and will continue to do so. This role also supports the local nurse or other member of the Interprofessional Team who will be the school's primary contact at NH. The local nurse or Interprofessional Team member will reach out to their assigned school(s) in early September.

### When and how to get in touch with Northern Health

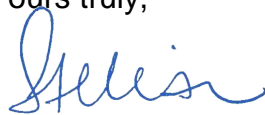
Schools are encouraged to contact Northern Health in the following situations:

Situation	Contact
Individual(s) in need of immediate medical care	Call 9-1-1.
<p><b>Urgent</b> questions or concerns about contagious diseases among students or staff, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• large clusters or outbreaks of common illnesses, such as gastrointestinal illness or influenza-like illness</li> <li>• cases of uncommon contagious diseases, such as measles, mumps, or pertussis (whooping cough)</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>or</i></p> <p><b>Routine</b> local planning related to non-urgent health issues (immunizations, education, health promotion, overdose prevention, injury prevention, mental health and wellness, etc.)</p>	Urgently or routinely contact the Interprofessional Team member assigned to your school. This team will be reaching out to school principals early in the school year to provide specific contact information.
To learn more about Comprehensive School Health (CSH), or to discuss district priorities regarding health promotion in schools	Contact the Regional Nursing Lead for Healthy Schools and Youth, via email at <a href="mailto:healthyschools@northernhealth.ca">healthyschools@northernhealth.ca</a> , or by phone at 250-649-7543.

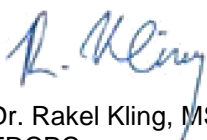
To review our previous communications on school and youth topics such as opioid overdose, SOGI education, measles catch-up campaign, a public health approach to non-medical cannabis etc., please visit <https://www.northernhealth.ca/health-topics/school-youth-health> and select Communications to Schools from Medical Health Officers.

Thank you for your attention to this information. We look forward to working together to ensure a healthy and safe school year.

Yours truly,



Dr. Sandra Allison, MPH  
CCFP FRCPC  
Chief Medical Health  
Officer  
Northern Health



Dr. Rakel Kling, MSc MPH  
FRCPC  
Medical Health Officer,  
Northern  
Northern Health



Dr. Raina Fumerton, MPH  
FRCPC  
Medical Health Officer,  
Northwest HSDA  
Northern Health

Dr. Jong Kim, MSc,  
FRCPC  
Medical Health Officer,  
Northeast HSDA  
Northern Health