



September 18, 2023

Dear Education and Early Learning and Child Care Partner,

We are writing this letter to provide an update about the public health guidance in anticipation of the increase in respiratory illnesses we usually see during the fall and winter months throughout the province. In general, public health guidance on health and safety measures remains unchanged from what we experienced in schools and early learning and child care settings at the end of June.

COVID-19 continues to circulate and affect our population. However, the severe impacts of COVID-19 have been reduced compared to the beginning of the pandemic due to the less virulent variants that are currently circulating, the availability of vaccines and treatment, and population immunity from COVID-19 infection and vaccines. More recently, other respiratory infections have also returned and circulate similar to pre-pandemic years. Manitoba Health is anticipating a busy respiratory virus season ahead, with potential impacts from all respiratory viruses, including influenza, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Manitoba Health continues to monitor for increased health threats from a new COVID-19 variant or new pathogen, and will communicate and update guidance as required.

Weekly provincial updates on respiratory disease activity in Manitoba are available at: www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/surveillance/influenza/index.html. The public health guidance for this respiratory virus season builds upon the multi-layer strategies used to manage COVID-19 and helps to reduce the spread of multiple types of infections. Recommended strategies include:

Vaccination: Vaccines have been shown to be highly effective in preventing serious illness and death from COVID-19 and influenza. Updated formulations of the COVID-19 vaccines and the seasonal influenza vaccines will be available in the fall through doctors' offices, pharmacies and public health offices. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends that all individuals who have completed a primary series of COVID-19 vaccines receive a dose of the updated COVID-19 vaccine in the fall if it has been at least six months since their last dose or COVID-19 infection. This is especially important for individuals who are considered at high-risk for severe disease. Further information on COVID-19 and influenza vaccine programs is available at: www.manitoba.ca/covid19/vaccine.html and www.manitoba.ca/health/flu/index.html. COVID-19 and influenza vaccines will not be available at school clinics. School clinics are focused on immunizations as outlined in Manitoba's Routine School Immunization available at: www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/schedules.html#school

Infection prevention and control measures: Provide messaging about staying home when sick; cough etiquette and hand hygiene; and cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched and shared items and surfaces. Hand hygiene and cough etiquette posters are available to download from the Manitoba Health website at: www.manitoba.ca/health/flu/resources.html

Masks will continue to be an option individuals can use to limit the spread of respiratory viruses. Individuals can choose to wear a mask to protect themselves and to limit the spread of respiratory viruses to others. Each individual has different personal risk and the use of a mask is a personal choice. Further information on preventing transmission can be found at:

www.manitoba.ca/covid19/info-and-prevention.html

Managing individuals with symptoms: To reduce the spread of all viruses, children, students and staff who are sick should stay home and away from others until their fever is gone, their symptoms improve, and they feel able to resume normal activities. Additional recommendations while sick are:

- Avoid close contact with others, especially those at high risk of serious outcomes and high risk settings like personal care homes and health care facilities. If individuals become ill in your facility, they should be separated from others until they can go home, and be provided a mask to wear if they are able.
- Testing for COVID-19 and influenza is recommended for high risk individuals to determine whether they are eligible for treatment. Other individuals may choose to use a COVID-19 rapid antigen test if available. To find out if you may benefit from treatment for COVID-19 and how to get COVID-19 treatment, visit www.manitoba.ca/covid19/treatment.html
- Additional measures to consider include wearing a mask in indoor spaces, performing hand hygiene regularly, and cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched and shared surfaces and items often.
- If there are questions about worsening symptoms, call your health care provider or Health Links - Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257. Call 911 if symptoms are severe. Further information is also available on the Manitoba Health COVID-19 website www.manitoba.ca/covid19/symptoms-and-exposure.html.

Ventilation and Air Exchange: Continue to inspect all mechanical heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems regularly and seek solutions from qualified experts as needed to take actions as required. Open windows when the weather permits if it doesn't impact the functioning of ventilation systems.

Public health continues to work closely with education and early learning and child care partners to support the health and well being of children, students and staff in school and early learning and child care settings. Facility administrators can contact public health if they have concerns about communicable disease transmission within their settings and if they require additional support. A full list of local public health offices can be found at

www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html

Sincerely,



Dr. Brent Roussin, MD, JD, MPH, FRCPC
Chief Provincial Public Health Officer