

September 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The beginning of a new school year always brings a combination of excitement and nervousness for school children and their families. This is particularly true in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant change and uncertainty.

What has not changed, is your local public health unit's commitment to supporting the health of students, teachers and staff within area schools. For many years, public health has worked behind the scenes with schools to promote student health, and prevent and contain infectious diseases, including measles, influenza, pertussis, and meningitis. Now, we are taking what we've learned and applying those best practices to our pandemic response.

Public health professionals are experts in infection prevention and control. When an infectious disease is diagnosed within a school setting, we immediately switch to investigation mode; pinpointing the source of the infection, identifying close contacts, and recommending testing, if necessary. We have a lot of experience working in school settings and educating children and families about how to stay healthy during an outbreak.

Over the last six months we've learned a significant amount about how COVID-19 is spread and the best ways we can protect ourselves. **Please continue to model and talk about these strategies for staying healthy:**



wash your hands frequently and well;



disinfect high-touch surfaces often;



wear a mask in enclosed public spaces;



stay home when you are sick;



wherever possible, avoid close contact with people outside your social circle.

By following these strategies, you and your family will be well protected from COVID-19.

New questions about this virus will arise regularly and we remain committed to finding answers and sharing them with our education partners in a timely way. A safe return to school is one of the most critical objectives for all parents and guardians in our community. Our goal is to be timely and transparent in our communication with you and to make recommendations based on the best evidence available. Each school has been assigned a public health nurse, who will work collaboratively with administrators and teachers. You may wish to bookmark our website for quick access to the most updated resources about managing COVID-19 in a learning environment.

We look forward to seeing our school partners, parents and students – in person and virtually - in September, and we wish your children health and success for this new school year.

Dr. Joyce Lock
Medical Officer of Health
Southwestern Public Health