

March 10, 2020

Dear students and parents,

As we head into Spring Break, we know it is an exciting time for many – often including travel plans. Travel can offer us invaluable opportunities to grow and connect with the people and world around us.

Unfortunately, this year we're all also navigating the outbreak of COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus). As a school district, we have been monitoring the evolving situation closely, working alongside and taking direction locally from the health experts who are leading the way – Fraser Health, the BC Centre for Disease Control, the Office of the Provincial Health Officer – and looking to Global Affairs Canada and the World Health Organization as it pertains to international travel and tracking destinations of higher concern.

While individuals and families may assume higher levels of risk, as a school district we have to exercise an additional level of diligence to ensure the safety and well-being of our students, staff and volunteers come first. After careful consideration, we made the difficult decision to cancel a trip to New York and we are working with our respective families to sort through the logistics of that decision.

This is an evolving situation, and timely and accurate information is critical. We will continue to monitor the spread of COVID-19, evaluate risk factors and may need to reconsider other trips and large scale events, as the situation changes – though we want to assure parents, student and staff that we'll make every effort to give appropriate time to adjust plans.

We share in the disappointment of our students, staff, volunteers and families. But we must continue to prioritize the health and safety of all people involved.

Now, for **parents, students and staff who may be travelling internationally over Spring Break for personal reasons, please consider whether a self-imposed quarantining or self-monitoring upon return may be appropriate.** Symptoms to watch for include fever, cough, muscle aches or difficulty breathing. Currently the broad regions of most concern are China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Iran, Italy, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Spain ... updates to that list can be found here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html>

Please note: there are cities and communities in other countries, not listed above, also experiencing outbreaks and the overall situation will continue to change.

Specific recommendations for travel and practices on return are coming from a number of health and governmental agencies. Of particular note:

- The BC Centre for Disease Control is advising that anybody arriving in Canada from either Iran or Hubei Province, China should stay home to self-isolate for 14 days and monitor themselves closely for symptoms.
- The BC Centre for Disease Control is also advising that anyone concerned they may have been exposed to, or are experiencing symptoms of, the Coronavirus should contact their primary care provider, local public health office or call 811 – whether the suspected exposure happens while travelling or not. Translation services for 811 are available in more than 130 languages.

- The Public Health Agency of Canada is recommending all Canadians avoid cruise ship travel due to the ongoing outbreak.

As always, there are precautions that can be taken to reduce the risk of spread. Wash your hands often (for 20 seconds) with soap and water, use hand-sanitizer when soap and water isn't available, avoid touching your face, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or cough into your elbow), and dispose of tissues in plastic lined garbage bins. Remind your children to do the same and discourage the sharing of food and drink with others. And if you or your children have symptoms of a cold or influenza, even if they are mild, please make plans to stay at home and avoid contact with others.

We thank you for your understanding. We'll continue to post updates and links to other sources you may find helpful on our website at: newwestschools.ca/coronavirus/

Wishing you good health and a happy Spring Break,

Karim Hachlaf
Superintendent/CEO

