

Date:	December 14, 2020
To:	Superintendents of Public Schools and Independent Schools
From:	Northern Health Medical Health Officers Petrina Bryant, Regional Nursing Lead, Healthy Schools Sarah Brown, Regional Nursing Lead, Children and Youth
Re:	Notification of Covid-19 School Exposures: Update and Clarification

Covid-19 case and contact follow-up process:

Public Health (PH) follows a rigorous process to follow up high-priority positive Covid-19 test results, including all those who were at a school during their infectious period:

- PH receives a copy of any new positive test result for Covid-19 in the north.
- PH interviews the case to determine when and how they may have been infected, when they themselves may have been infectious, and who else they may have exposed while they were infectious.
- PH directly notifies any identifiable close contacts who are determined to be at increased personal risk of exposure:
 - PH determines who is a “close contact” according to a set of standard criteria (e.g. distance, duration, ventilation, mask use, body fluid contact).
 - Close contacts may occur at home, in a social setting, at school or work, or any other setting. PH advises these close contacts to self-isolate.
 - In most cases, the case themselves are able to provide all the necessary information on their close contacts. Occasionally, additional information may be needed from the school or other settings.
- Low-risk, non-close contacts are generally not notified individually, as transmission to non-close contacts is rare. Most members of a classroom or learning group are typically considered non-close contacts.

At this time, the [recently-announced changes to contact tracing in Northern Health](#) do not affect this process. Schools remain a priority area for contact follow-up.

School notification process:

When PH determines that a Covid-19 case was in the school setting during their infectious period, they also follow the process outlined in the [COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for the K-12 School Settings](#) in [Appendix B](#) on page 22.

The Superintendent is notified first, who then notifies the school Principal. If the exposure is at an Independent School with no Superintendent, the Principal is notified directly. When a school exposure is identified on a weekend, the school notification will take place the following business day.

NH will then provide an exposure letter to the school administrator, to support the school in notifying school staff, parents and students. Once the school community is informed, then the exposure is included on the [NH Public Exposures and Outbreaks](#) website under Covid-19 school exposures. Please note, there can be a significant lag time from the time a school may become aware of a case, to the time the school receives the Covid-19 school exposure notification from NH. Most people

receive their results directly (e.g. by text message from the BC Centre for Disease Control), and they may – but are not obliged to – share that result immediately with anyone they wish to inform. As a result, school administrators may become aware of new cases or contacts much sooner than PH can work through the volume of cases, make contact with that case, complete the investigation and risk assessment, and initiate contact with the school.

Please also note, that the school will not be informed if the case reports that they were not at school during their infectious period.

There is no need to notify NH if you hear of Covid-19 cases or contacts in the schools or in the community. We will be in touch once we are able to confirm that exposure may have occurred.

School notification process during the winter break:

During the winter break (Dec.19, 2020 - Jan. 1, 2021), NH will shift to online notification of Covid-19 school exposures by posting on the [NH Public Exposures and Outbreaks](#) website, rather than notifying school administrators and sending exposure letters.

- When a school exposure is posted on the website, school staff and students must self-monitor for Covid-19 symptoms for 14 days from the last date of exposure.
- If anyone develops Covid-19-like symptoms, they should call their Primary Care Provider or the Northern Health Virtual Clinic at 1 844 645-7811 for evaluation and testing.
- PH will continue to follow up with Covid-19 cases and close contacts in the school setting and notify any close contacts that need to self-isolate.
- It is imperative that everyone follow the provincial public health orders that are in place and avoid gatherings over the winter break.

Covid-19 school exposures continue to be low risk. Despite the number of exposures that have occurred, very few instances of transmission have been linked to the school setting. Existing health and safety measures are working well to decrease or stop any transmission in schools and should continue to be promoted and enforced. Staff and students should continue to use the daily health check form, stay home if they are sick, and arrange for testing if they develop Covid-19-like symptoms by calling their Primary Care Provider or the Northern Health Virtual Clinic at 1 844 645-7811.

We look forward to working together with you to help keep schools safe throughout the school year. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jong Kim, MD MSc
FRCPC
Chief Medical Health Officer
Northern Health



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

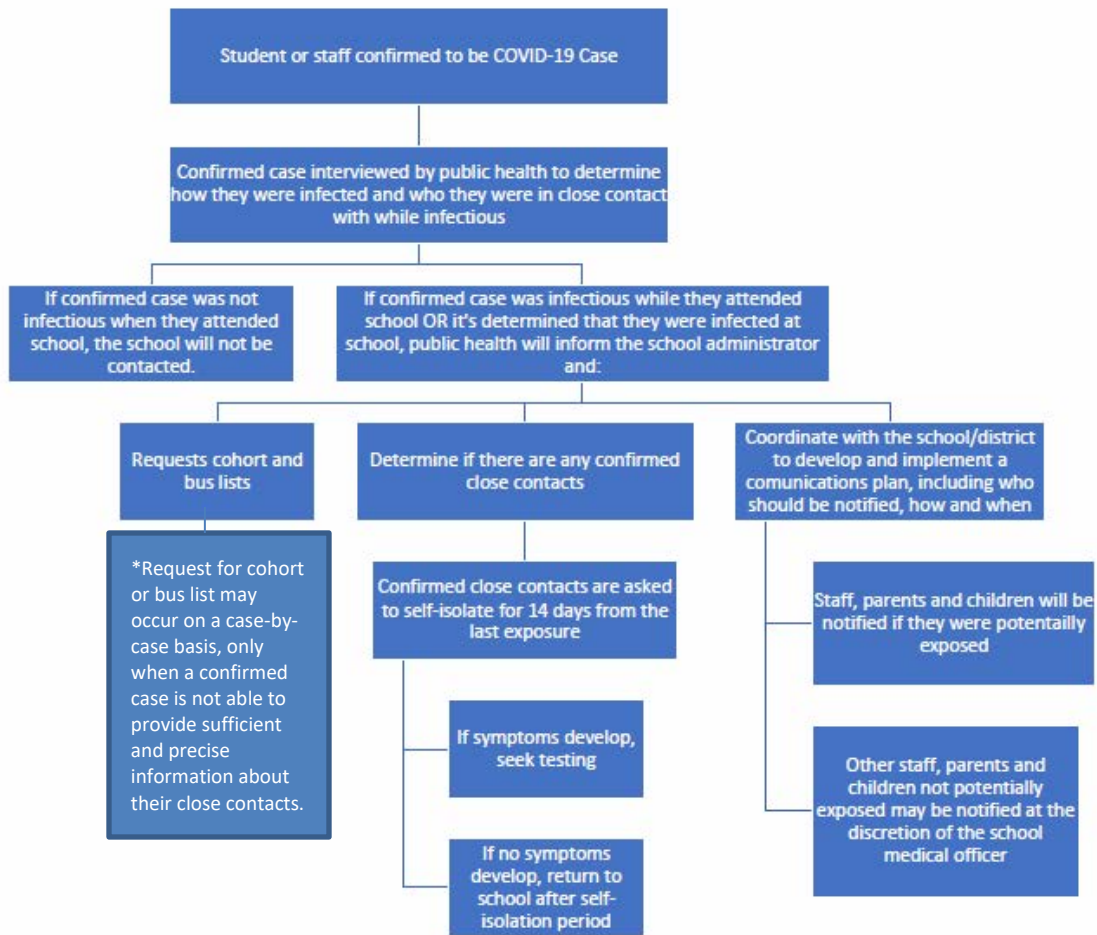


Dr. Raina Fumerton, MD
MPH FRCPC
Medical Health Officer,
Northwest and A/Northeast
Northern Health



Dr. Andrew Gray, MD MSc
FRCPC
Medical Health Officer
Northern Health

Appendix B: Public Health Actions if a Staff, Student or Other Person Who Has Been in the School is a Confirmed COVID-19 Case



Confirmed close contacts are determined based on the length of time of exposure and nature of the interaction. Only public health can determine who is a close contact.