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Information Letter to Schools

Re: Swine Flu Virus Under Surveillance

The Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) is currently working with other British Columbia Health Authorities, the BC Center for Disease Control (BCCDC) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), among other partners, to investigate and respond to the recent spread of Swine flu.

What is Swine Flu?

- Swine flu is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that regularly cause outbreaks of flu in pigs. Natural changes to this particular Swine flu virus have allowed it to infect humans. The ability of this virus to spread easily from person-to-person is not fully known at this time and it is unclear if person-to-person spread is occurring in significant numbers in our region.
- The symptoms of Swine flu in people can be similar to the symptoms of a regular seasonal flu infection, which may include fever, cough, headache, general aches, fatigue and other symptoms. Some people with Swine flu have also reported runny nose, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Is there a risk from students from Mexico?

The risk that students from Mexico pose to BC residents is extremely small due to the facts that:

- Very few will be arriving in the immediate future.
- They make up a very small fraction of all the people that come to BC.
- Non-Mexican students who have visited Mexico could also be a source of influenza in the school setting.

No specific measures are recommended for Mexican foreign students.

What should we do with students who have either traveled to or are arriving from Mexico?

- Continue all educational programs and school activities as per normal procedures.
- Report any influenza-like illness school absenteeism of greater than 10 percent of the school population to your local health unit.
- Allow well travelers arriving from Mexico or other Swine flu affected areas to participate in regular activities. Travelers should monitor themselves for symptoms and, if experiencing flu-like illness, should follow the prevention tips below to avoid spreading illness to others.

What precautions can people take?

- Cover your cough or sneeze with your arm or shoulder. An educational and entertaining video teaching the proper way to sneeze and cough can be viewed at <http://www.coughsafe.com/>
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze and before you eat. Alcohol based hand gels are also effective (schools may wish to consider keeping these in classrooms).
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Infections can spread that way.
- If you develop a fever and cough, stay home and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.
- If your symptoms become more severe contact your health care provider.

Where can I get more information?

- The public can call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with any questions or concerns.
- Superintendents and School Administrators can contact the local health unit, identify themselves as a school representative and ask to speak with a Public Health Nurse with any influenza specific questions/concerns.
- Information is evolving rapidly and we encourage regular review of the VIHA website, www.viha.ca. This site contains Island specific information as well as links to the BCCDC and PHAC.

Yours sincerely,



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