

October 30, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Many children have returned to school, childcare programs and activities; and parents and providers have taken seriously their responsibility to protect them from COVID-19. I know it has been a challenging time and I sincerely thank everyone for their continued efforts.

Your actions to keep your children safe, such as checking them daily for symptoms and using the Alberta Health daily checklist are much appreciated. We developed the symptom checklist – just as we have developed all public health measures – using the best evidence available as well as what we have learned from other jurisdictions.

Over the past two months, we have seen few cases of transmission occurring in schools and licensed and approved childcare programs in Alberta. While cases in school-aged children have risen since September, this pattern is identical to other age groups and reflects increased community transmission. Since September, only six per cent of all COVID-19 cases in those aged five to 19 have been acquired at school. We are preventing the spread of the virus in schools and childcare programs and protecting one another by working together.

My team and I continue to assess all emerging evidence to adjust our approach when it is safe to do so. This is the case now. Upon careful review of the evidence on COVID-19 symptoms for children under the age of 18, and based on what we have experienced in Alberta and our learnings from other provinces, we have revised the daily checklist for children and youth under the age of 18. This checklist also applies to those 18 and over who are students in high school. This checklist will be in effect starting November 2.

What are the changes to the symptom checklist?

The biggest change is that we have removed runny nose and sore throat from the mandatory isolation checklist. This means that any child who only has one of these symptoms will no longer be recommended for COVID-19 testing and does not need to be kept home for 10 days. Instead, they should stay home for 24 hours and monitor their condition. If they are feeling better after 24 hours, they may return to school and/or activities. If they are feeling worse, or if additional symptoms appear, they should be tested for COVID-19 and stay home until all symptoms are resolved.

This change brings Alberta in line with B.C., Ontario and Quebec, which have all made similar changes. We have discussed the changes with colleagues in these provinces, and there has been no corresponding increase in COVID-19 transmission in schools and childcare programs as a result. We have also looked at our own evidence. Of all the children under 18 who have been tested for COVID-19 recently, less than 1 per cent of those with only a runny nose or only a sore throat tested positive for COVID-19. For children who are not known to be close contacts of a COVID-19 case, having a common symptom like a runny nose or sore throat by itself does not signal a high risk of being infected.

In the new daily checklist, the core isolation symptoms are those that are more closely linked to COVID-19 infection. If a child has **ANY** of the following core symptoms: cough, fever, shortness of breath and loss of taste or smell:

- They are to isolate for 10 days OR have a negative COVID-19 test result and feel better before going back to school.

Additionally, the action for children with other symptoms will depend on both the number of symptoms and the duration of symptoms. If a child has **ONE** of the following symptoms: chills; sore throat or painful swallowing; runny nose or congestion; feeling unwell or fatigue; nausea, vomiting, diarrhea; unexplained loss of appetite; muscle or joint aches; headache; conjunctivitis (pink eye):

- They should stay home and monitor their symptom for 24 hours.
- If the symptom is improving after 24 hours, they can return to their childcare program, school or other activities when they feel well enough to go. Testing is not recommended.
- If the symptom worsens after 24 hours (or if additional symptoms appear), they are to continue to stay home and testing is recommended but not required. The child can return to their childcare program, activities and/or school when their symptoms have resolved AND it has been 24 hours or more since their symptoms started.

If the child has any **TWO** of the following: chills; sore throat or painful swallowing; runny nose or congestion; feeling unwell or fatigue; nausea, vomiting, diarrhea; unexplained loss of appetite; muscle or joint aches; headache; conjunctivitis (pink eye):

- They should stay home.
- Testing is recommended but not required.
- The child can attend school or their childcare program and other public places when their symptoms have resolved AND it has been 24 hours or more since their symptoms started.

As a parent myself, I know how challenging it can be to assess mild symptoms and make decisions about whether children are truly ill or not. It is also challenging, both for parents and children, to keep a child away from school and other activities for an

extended time, especially when symptoms are mild. The changes to the checklist will help get children back into their childcare program, the classroom and to activities as quickly and safely as possible.

Thank you for your continued efforts to keep your children and all Albertans safe. Please continue to look out for one another.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deena Hinshaw". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "D" and "H".

Deena Hinshaw, BSc, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCP
Chief Medical Officer of Health