

Joint Statement from to Dr. Patricia Daly, VCH Chief Medical Health Officer and Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer

Being a parent in a pandemic comes with a lot of challenges and public health officials are here to help.

Public health has a long history of working collaboratively to promote and protect the health of our school communities. Like every year, we will support our teachers and education staff to make this return to school successful.

The robust school safety plans currently in place across the province are designed to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 in school settings.

VCH Public Health teams actively monitor and trace cases of COVID-19 in schools on a 24/7 basis. Our immediate priority for every known case is to identify people who have been their close contacts during the infectious period, to notify these contacts and then to ensure that all contacts are following the appropriate public health directions for self-isolation.

Whether in schools or in other settings, VCH Public Health notifies all contacts of cases exposed to COVID-19 in the most direct manner possible. This is the most effective contact tracing practice – it allows Public Health to provide clear direction to those contacts while respecting patient confidentiality which is important for the effective management of the pandemic.

When there has been exposure of classrooms or cohorts of students and staff in a school setting, we work with the school administrator to quickly send an email and letter to notify the staff and students (or their parents) identified as contacts. VCH Public Health will follow-up directly with all contacts who receive a notification in order to provide further public health advice. All notifications to school administrators – including school exposure and outbreaks – are posted to the VCH school exposure webpage at <http://www.vch.ca/covid-19/school-exposures>.

Schools are part of our communities – and a safe community means a safe school. That is why we in public health will continue to promptly and appropriately respond to cases, clusters and outbreaks of COVID-19 to ensure our communities, and the schools in them, remain at low risk for COVID-19 transmission.

COVID-19 will be around for months to come – and public health officials will be here with us through it all.