

**March 11, 2021**

**Superintendent Jordan Tinney's Q & A with Fraser Health's Dr. Zbar.**

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**1. Why do some school districts have more COVID-19 exposures than other districts?**

COVID-19 exposures in schools are a direct reflection of COVID-19 cases in the community.

If there are a large number of cases in a particular city or neighbourhood, it is likely that we will see a correlation in the number of exposures in schools in that community.

We must all continue to work together to ensure fewer cases of COVID-19 enter schools.

**2. How are teachers involved in contact tracing?**

Case and contact tracing is a rigorous process that involves gathering information from the case and/or the case's caregivers to determine when symptoms started, identify where the student or staff may have gotten the virus and determine close contacts within and outside the school.

The school principal supports this process by confirming attendance records, staff and student schedules, class and/or cohort structure as well as the safety plans that are in place and how they are followed.

If needed, the principal may consult the classroom teacher for additional details; however this is not always required in order to complete the investigation.

**3. How do you determine which students and staff need to self-isolate?**

Public health will sometimes ask an individual or an entire class to self-isolate. This is determined through case and contact tracing.

Public health considers a variety of factors when determining whom to isolate such as time spent in close contact between cases and contacts, if the case was coughing or sneezing and so on.

Sometimes, depending on public health's assessment and in consultation with the affected school, a whole class may be asked to isolate.

**4. When would a school be closed?**

If there are a number of cases at an individual school, public health first looks to identify the source of acquisition for each of the cases and whether or not they are connected.

If it is determined that there is transmission, we look to understand if that transmission is contained within a cohort.

If we suspect there is widespread transmission in the school, public health may require a school closure. If there are many close contacts who need to isolate and this impacts the safe operation of a school, the school may decide to close in what is known as a “functional closure”.

**5. Can you tell us a bit more about how the variants of concern, differ from “standard COVID-19” and how Fraser Health responds when a variant is identified in a school?**

The key difference is that some variant strains can transmit more quickly and easily.

Fraser Health’s Public Health team has been working closely with schools to manage COVID-19 variant of concern exposures.

As variants are new to our communities and may be more easily transmissible, we are actively working to identify any further connected variant cases to ensure immediate isolation and case management to prevent further transmission.

In addition, we have expanded COVID-19 testing recommendations to include all high-risk contacts of individuals who test positive for COVID-19, regardless of whether they are experiencing symptoms. This includes staff and students who will receive self-isolation letters from their school.

**6. When a variant of concern is involved, does Fraser Health’s definition of a “close contact” change? If a variant of concern is involved, will you require testing of all close contacts at the outset?**

Staff and students who test positive for variants of COVID-19 are asked similar questions to other members of the public, but with questions that are tailored to the school setting so we can make sure we have captured close contacts.

Furthermore, as a result of the new variant and an increase in the number of cases in our region, everyone who tests positive for COVID-19 is being asked additional questions about their exposures and contacts. This allows public health to quickly identify others who need to be tested and isolated. We are also now advising that all close contacts be tested, even if they have no symptoms.

Public health continually adapts our processes and guidelines to be consistent with new evidence and emergent issues.

**7. Should the health and safety measures implemented in schools change when we know there is variant of concern in our community?**

Schools have worked hard to implement robust COVID-19 Safety Plans since September.

What we have seen in general is that the safety plans are quite effective at stopping the spread of COVID-19 in schools. What we have learned from other countries, is that while the variant may

spread more easily, it spreads in the same way, which means that our current safety measures are still effective.

In our experience with school exposures to the COVID-19 variant of concern, we are seeing similar outcomes: transmission is occurring between close contacts and not widespread within schools. We continue to closely monitor schools with a variant exposure. It is very important that we remain committed to bringing our safety plans to life – by looking at different ways to create physical distancing in classrooms, increasing opportunities for handwashing, limiting access to shared items, and promoting mask use where appropriate. Most importantly, we must remember to apply all of these practices in our own personal lives so that we are limiting any exposure of COVID-19 in our schools.

**8. Is it safe to work in a room with no windows for ventilation?**

Good air ventilation can help to reduce the risk of COVID-19, in combination with other measures. Proper ventilation is important, so we advise schools to ensure that mechanical heating, ventilation and cooling systems are in good working order.

**9. Education Assistants are sometimes required to perform personal care. How can they do this safely when they cannot physically distance?**

Providing support to students with disabilities, different abilities or complex medical conditions is incredibly important to our education system and ensuring that all students can access in-person education.

I understand that Education Assistants are often involved in situations where physical distance is not possible. The Provincial Guidelines for K-12 Settings outline recommendations that schools need to consider for staff providing enhanced student supports. These include always wearing a non-medical facemask or a face shield if lip-reading and visual facial cues are essential. In addition, staff should follow their standard risk assessment to determine if additional personal protective equipment is required.