

Next week is December and as we approach the winter break I wanted to underscore what we are doing to keep our schools open and safe from COVID. We are all concerned about the rapidly growing number of cases and we want to make sure that we are all working together to protect our schools and to keep our community safe. This week, I have a message about the things that we are asking parents and secondary students to do.

Parents:

- Talk to your child about safety at school and minimizing physical contact and staying distant wherever possible
- When you bring your young child to school, please wear a mask
- Continue to monitor your child every day for symptoms
- Reinforce the health orders – unfortunately, playdates and carpooling with children outside your home are things that we need to curtail.

Secondary Students:

- Only 1/2 of you are doing your daily health checks every day and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of you say only sometimes or never – please do this. It's important for us all.
- Please continue to try to stay physically distanced in the hallways – we know it's a challenge. Over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of you say that students never follow social distancing when outside your cohort. We need you to help us with this.
- Thank you! – Our survey of grades 10-12 students 99.8% say that they are wearing a mask either all the time or often at school. Anytime you are outside the class – wear a mask. Please.

I am sending this message this week specifically to our parents and secondary students. Every day, our district, our schools and our staff are doing many things. They are doing their health checks, they are following protocols, they are organizing their classrooms so students are not face to face, and they are curtailing face to face meetings and informal time at schools. All of our staff are making adjustments and we're wanting to make sure we're all part of the puzzle.

Yes, COVID is ramping up. Our cases are on the rise and we all know that Surrey is a specific hot spot. A recent report showed that Surrey has over 4000 active COVID cases in our community. We all know that this means that COVID will be in our schools and worksites. In my workplace, we have had 3 Notices of Exposures so far this year. No site is immune.

To date, we have issued more than 220 Notices of Exposures which means that someone was at school while infectious with COVID. In the 220 notices, there have been 4 cases where full classes needed to be put in self-isolation. Yes, there has been transmission. It has happened, but it has happened fewer than 5 times in over 200 notices. These cases of transmission also refer to individual

classrooms in an entire school. We have well over 3000 classes happening on any given day. Despite over 4000 active cases in our community, we have over 50 schools that have never received a Notice of Exposure.

While the risk is low, there still is risk and it is very serious. Last week, we had the outbreak at Cambridge Elementary. This means the closure of a school for 2 weeks, the entire community in isolation and a teacher in hospital. This is not what any of us would like to happen and we will continue to work to do all we can to protect our schools and our staff.

This weekend, I drove to Douglas Elementary which opens today. In the school there were excited staff doing final preparations to welcome children on opening day. As I drove around the school, parents and students were walking the school grounds, looking at the school and sure seemed excited to finally see a school open in their community. On my weekend walk, I had grandparents stop me and talk about how important it was to have their grandchildren in school. This morning, grabbing my tea, I had the Starbucks barista thank me for all we are doing to keep schools open.

Schools matter, we all care, and it's important that we all are doing whatever we can to protect our schools. Being in school means a chance to play and connect, a chance to receive a meal, a chance to get the social and emotional support that our children need, a chance to continue to pursue your dreams of life beyond grade 12. I am extremely thankful that schools are open and every day, we know that we are giving a sense of normalcy to the lives of children when all around them seems to be disrupted. Yes, school looks different, but every day the caring and dedicated teachers, support staff, principal and vice-principals are there to greet and support your child. It's why we all entered the profession we are in, it's our life's work.

As we all take the steps we need to every day, please keep doing the things you need to do to keep our schools safe and open.