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Public Health
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January 24, 2020.

Dear school community members:

Re: *Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)*

Toronto Public Health (TPH) has received questions from members of the school community about the spread of a new coronavirus in Wuhan, China (referred to as 2019-nCoV). There have been no laboratory confirmed cases of this new coronavirus in Canada and the risk of cases occurring in Canada is low, however, we are writing to provide you with this update on the situation.

Human coronaviruses are common throughout the world and can cause mild, moderate or severe respiratory illness in some people. Symptoms of the 2019-nCoV have included fever, cough and difficulty breathing and studies are underway to try and understand this virus better. As of January 22, 2020, cases of this new disease have been identified in other areas of China, Thailand, Macau, Hong Kong, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Taiwan and two cases in the United States. We continue to monitor this situation closely along with our provincial and federal public health colleagues, and plans are in place to respond as this situation changes.

The 2019-nCoV virus has been identified at the same time as influenza and many other respiratory viruses are circulating in Toronto, which is common at this time of the year. As a reminder, influenza, also known as the flu, can spread to others before symptoms even appear. Typical flu symptoms include sudden onset of high fever, chills, sore throat, cough and muscle aches. Other common symptoms include headache, loss of appetite and feeling tired. Recovering from the flu usually takes a week to 10 days, but for some people it can worsen pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma or heart disease.

Members of the public are advised to take the usual measures to reduce the risk of transmission of the flu and respiratory illness. These measures include:

- get a yearly influenza vaccination, available from clinics and pharmacies;
- wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze;
- if you don’t have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm; and
- stay home if you are ill.

Residents who return from recent international travel and become ill with respiratory signs and symptoms such as cough and fever are reminded to report their travel history to any health professional, or emergency department staff, when they visit.

The Ontario Minister of Health has made this new disease reportable to public health so that if potential cases are identified in Toronto, they will be promptly reported to the Medical Officer of Health. Information has been provided to hospitals to increase their screening processes for individuals who present with signs and symptoms of this new disease, and have travelled to Wuhan, China. This will help ensure cases are identified promptly and actions taken to prevent its spread.

As this situation continues to change, we will continue to share information promptly.

More Information can be found on the following websites:
Toronto Public Health:
https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/diseases-medications-vaccines/coronavirus/

Public Health Agency of Canada:
https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html#a1

Government of Canada Travel Advice and Advisory:
https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories/pneumonia-china

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Finkelstein
Acting Director, Communicable Disease Control
and Associate Medical Officer of Health