

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, sweeping flourish at the end.

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

COVID-19 INFORMATION

COVID-19 ALBERTA HEALTH DAILY CHECKLIST (FOR CHILDREN UNDER 18)

Overview

This checklist applies for all children, as well as all students who attend kindergarten to Grade 12, including high school students over 18. Children should be screened every day by completing this checklist before going to school, child care or other activities. Children may need a parent or guardian to assist them to complete this screening tool.

Screening Questions

1. Has the child:

(Choose any/all possible exposures)

Traveled outside Canada in the last 14 days? When entering or returning to Alberta from outside Canada, individuals are legally required to quarantine for 14 days unless enrolled in the Alberta COVID-19 International Border Pilot Project	YES	NO
Had close contact with a case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days? Face-to-face contact within 2 metres for 15 minutes or longer, or direct physical contact such as hugging	YES	NO
If the child answered "YES" to any of the above: <ul style="list-style-type: none">The child is required to quarantine for 14 days from the last day of exposure.<ul style="list-style-type: none">If the child is participating in the Alberta COVID-19 International Border Pilot Project, they must comply with the program restrictions at all times.If the child develops any symptoms, use the AHS Online Assessment Tool or call Health Link 811 to determine if testing is recommended.		
If the child answered "NO" to both of the above: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Proceed to question 2.		

2. Does the child have any new onset (or worsening) of the following core symptoms:

Fever Temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or higher	YES	NO
Cough Continuous, more than usual, not related to other known causes or conditions such as asthma	YES	NO
Shortness of breath Continuous, out of breath, unable to breathe deeply, not related to other known causes or conditions such as asthma	YES	NO
Loss of sense of smell or taste Not related to other known causes or conditions like allergies or neurological disorders	YES	NO
If the child answered "YES" to any symptom in question 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none">The child is to isolate for 10 days from onset of symptoms.Use the AHS Online Assessment Tool or call Health Link 811 to arrange for testing and to receive additional information on isolation.		
If the child answered "NO" to all of the symptoms in question 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Proceed to question 3.		

3. Does the child have any new onset (or worsening) of the following other symptoms:

Chills Without fever, not related to being outside in cold weather	YES	NO
Sore throat/painful swallowing Not related to other known causes/conditions, such as seasonal allergies or reflux	YES	NO
Runny nose/congestion Not related to other known causes/conditions, such as seasonal allergies or being outside in cold weather	YES	NO
Feeling unwell/fatigued Lack of energy, poor feeding in infants, not related to other known causes or conditions, such as depression, insomnia, thyroid dysfunction or sudden injury	YES	NO
Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea Not related to other known causes or conditions, such as anxiety, medication or irritable bowel syndrome	YES	NO
Unexplained loss of appetite Not related to other known causes or conditions, such as anxiety or medication	YES	NO
Muscle/joint aches Not related to other known causes or conditions, such as arthritis or injury	YES	NO
Headache Not related to other known causes or conditions, such as tension-type headaches or chronic migraines	YES	NO
Conjunctivitis (commonly known as pink eye)	YES	NO
<p>If the child answered “YES” to ONE symptom in question 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home and monitor for 24 hours. • If their symptom is improving after 24 hours, they can return to school and activities when they feel well enough to go. Testing is not necessary. • If the symptom does not improve or worsens after 24 hours (or if additional symptoms emerge), use the AHS Online Assessment Tool or call Health Link 811 to check if testing is recommended. <p>If the child answered “YES” to TWO OR MORE symptoms in question 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your child home. • Use the AHS Online Assessment Tool or call Health Link 811 to determine if testing is recommended. • Your child can return to school and activities once their symptoms go away as long as it has been at least 24 hours since their symptoms started. <p>If the child answered “NO” to all questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your child may attend school, child care and/or other activities. 		

Please note: If your child is experiencing any symptoms from the lists above, do not bring them to visit a continuing care or acute care facility for 10 days from when symptoms started/until symptoms resolve (whichever is longer), unless they receive a negative COVID-19 test result and feel better.