

May 4, 2009

To: Principals, Funded and Non-Funded Independent Schools

I am writing to provide clarification about the approach schools should take regarding school closures, and responses to questions from parents about this, as it relates to the emerging H1N1 flu situation. As you may be aware, Manitoba reported its first case of H1N1 flu on May 3rd. The individual is of school age.

Some local authorities in other provinces have been taking action either without consulting, or even contrary to the advice of, public health officials. The Government of Manitoba is striving to ensure that does not happen here and that there is an appropriate balance between the protection of public health and the mitigation of societal disruption. Hence Manitoba Health and Healthy Living officials have advised that routine precautionary measures should be taken to reduce the chance of becoming ill. As well, they have advised that, to date, symptoms of the H1N1 virus have been relatively mild. At this time, there has been no indication to close any school in the province for the purpose of protecting the health of the public.

Accordingly, in consultation with Manitoba Health and Healthy Living officials, I am advising that schools should not be closed with regard to this matter unless directed to by the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth who will provide such direction based on consultation with the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and/or your regional medical officer of health. If you wish to discuss your particular situation with a medical officer of health, please call 788-8666 (24/7). Please be assured that the situation is being assessed on an ongoing basis to determine the most appropriate public health interventions to best protect the health of Manitobans. For personal advice on self-care or when to seek further care, Manitobans should contact their primary-care physician or other health-care provider or phone Health Links—Info Santé at 788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 (toll-free). For links to more information related to the H1N1 flu, please refer to the H1N1 flu website at www.Manitoba.ca.

If you have any questions about this matter please don't hesitate to contact me at 945-3752 (office) or 781-0998 (cell), or David Yeo at 945-8664 (office). Thank you for your continuing cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Gerald Farthing

c. Honourable Peter Bjornson, Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth
Honourable Theresa Oswald, Minister of Health
Arlene Wilgosh, Deputy Minister of Health & Healthy Living
Shelley Hasinoff, Coordinator, Independent Education Unit
Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools
Archdiocese of Winnipeg Catholic Schools
Catholic Schools Commission
Winnipeg Board of Jewish Education