

# 'Now is the time': N.L. to close all schools, child-care centres to curb spread of COVID-19 <sup>[1]</sup>

Hospitals postponing non-urgent appointments, limiting visitors

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## AVAILABILITY

Access online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

All schools across Newfoundland and Labrador are closing in an effort to slow down the spread of COVID-19, Premier Dwight Ball announced Monday.

Early childhood education centres and regulated daycare centres will also close, in addition to the College of the North Atlantic.

"Now is the time," Ball told a news conference.

"We see ourselves in a position where we can be proactive."

### We all have to practice what is a new normal.- Premier Dwight Ball

The decision affects 64,000 students from K-12, another 7,300 in daycare, and 5,200 students at College of the North Atlantic.

Regulated family child care homes are exempt from the closure of child care services, said the government Monday evening, because the number of children attending is much smaller than centres.

Schools will be open Wednesday and Thursday for students to pick up items at staggered times, which the NLESD will set. Schools will be open for teachers for the rest of the week for planning purposes.

District CEO Tony Stack said information will be going out to schools on how the days will be split up for students to retrieve their items.

"There will be regular busing in the morning, and say A to M go to school on that day. They're only going to be there for a couple hours, just to finalize things and pick things up and then head back out," he said.

"If parents don't want to send their child to school, if there's a reason they can't, then there will be an opportunity for parents to attend the school in the afternoon, a session to retrieve those items."

Stack said the district suspected weeks ago things would end up at this point and has done some planning on what to do about instruction while students are at home.

"As things stand right now, as you know, all instruction is suspended. This is about getting together all the instructional materials that we need and distributing them. Now, you cannot just flick a switch and turn into an online learning platform."

### Graduating students a priority: Stack

Much of the district's ability to provide online learning is in the form of equipment and software that is meant for smaller-scale use, he said. But there are online resources that will be available for students, he said.

"This is about our program staff now, who have been collating resources, video, family-friendly access that hopefully we can have it so all grades can access."

But there are going to be gaps, he acknowledged.

"This is certainly not in any way able to replace face-to-face instruction, so our focus, really, our main priority, is on ensuring students eligible to graduate this year will receive a valid mark, graduate on time, and not be disadvantaged in terms of their post-secondary plans."

On Monday evening, the province's francophone school district also announced it was suspending classes immediately, with busing in place Wednesday morning to allow students to gather any materials they need to continue learning from home.

### Self-isolation for public sector works returning from travel

All public sector employees who have returned from travel outside the country need to self-isolate, said Ball, and arrangements are underway to ensure all public employees that can be set up to work from home starting Tuesday.

Employees in the health-care sector will receive direction from the regional health authorities, the government said in a statement Monday evening.

"We all have to practice what is a new normal," said Ball.

All public libraries in the province are closed for now.

All masses within the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John's and services within the Anglican Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador are cancelled until further notice.

### **So far no new presumptive cases**

As of Monday afternoon, there was still just one presumptive case of COVID-19, with 193 individuals in self-isolation.

The one case is of a woman who returned to the Labrador-Grenfell Health region from a Caribbean cruise. More presumptive positive cases are expected.

Memorial University classes are also moving to online instruction, with in-person classes ending Wednesday.

The decision the provincial government is making "is about prevention, not perfection," Ball said.

Ball was joined at the news conference by Health Minister John Haggie, Education Minister Brian Warr and the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Janice Fitzgerald.

The decision to shutter schools represents an about-face on that policy in less than 24 hours, and after a ramp up of public pressure, including from the province's Teachers' Association and Federation of School Councils.

Two private schools had already decided to close their doors and didn't wait for government: St. Bonaventure's College in St. John's and Immaculate Heart of Mary in Corner Brook.

### **High risk? Stay away from Costco: chief medical officer**

Postpone or cancel gatherings, and keep two metres between you and another person, urged Fitzgerald.

Anyone with a compromised immune system or other high-risk factors should stay at home as much as possible.

"Try to avoid busy times of the supermarket or Costco. Maybe Costco altogether," Fitzgerald said.

Some businesses had already announced they were closing or changing their hours.

She acknowledged that there is a lot of angst related to the spread of COVID-19, but cautioned it's not going to be a quick fix, though it's near impossible to predict just how long.

"We're not in this for the short term, this is it, likely for months," she said.

She also said people should make their mental health a priority, if self-isolating and when it relates social distancing.

"While this may be disruptive and overwhelming, I think if we all work together, which I know we're all able to do, we will be able to help flatten the curve and improve and protect the health of our population," Fitzgerald said.

"The responsibility on all of us as individuals is to make sure that we protect ourselves and others."

Haggie said that uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 is extra tricky since it's already flu season.

"We have more flu cases in this province this year than there are COVID-19 cases in Canada currently, we've had 461. We have 60 people in hospital at this present moment with influenza-like illnesses. You're then going to add another disease on top with the same kind of pattern" he said.

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**Region:** [Newfoundland](#) <sup>[3]</sup>

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