

Alberta cancels K-12 classes, closes child-care centres due to COVID-19 pandemic ^[1]

There are a total of 56 cases of COVID-19 in the province

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EXCERPTS

Classes at all K-12 schools in Alberta are cancelled and child-care centres have been closed indefinitely due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the province announced Sunday.

"We will be indefinitely cancelling classes across the province," Education Minister Adriana LaGrange said.

"School authorities are expected to continue their regular day-to-day operations and ensure the safety of our school facilities. We expect maintenance, capital projects, cleaning of facilities and administrative work to continue."

She called the closure "unprecedented" and said all options are on the table including online learning, but those decisions will be made in the coming days.

Every student will receive a final mark and students will be able to move to the next grade in the fall, according to LaGrange.

She added that provincial achievement tests would be cancelled but that required diploma exams will be offered.

Post-secondary classes have been cancelled, but campuses will remain open.

Edmonton Public Schools superintendent Darryl Robertson said the goal is to ensure students are not left behind.

He said online learning is being considered but that graduating students should be able to apply to post secondary schools as necessary.

"I know that our teacher-awarded marks are very accurate and they are very rich and comprehensive," Robertson said. "I believe that there are ways that we can work with the province in the coming weeks to see what we can do around that entrance to post secondary."

Robertson said plans are still coming together but access to schools is being considered to allow students to collect any personal belongings that may have been left behind.

Premier Jason Kenney told media Sunday that 17 new cases had been confirmed in the province in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of cases to 56.

Two cases were acquired through community transmission from an unknown source, and seven cases were traced back to a single gathering in the Calgary zone.

Kenney said health officials continue to investigate the source of those COVID-19 exposures.

He also said that Albertans should consider cancelling all non-essential travel plans.

"There is no good reason to be travelling for leisure purposes at this time," Kenney said.

Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's chief medical officer of health, also advised long-term care facilities, and other continuing care facilities, to limit access to essential visitors only.

Places of worship are no longer exempt from limitations put in place about mass gatherings, Hinshaw said.

"Our investigation determined that seven of these cases stem from a single gathering that took place in the Calgary zone," Hinshaw said. "This underlines the fact that gatherings can accelerate spread of the virus."

She reiterated her statement that this situation is creating a "new normal" for Albertans.

"We simply do not have the capacity to test every Albertan with a cough," Hinshaw said. "You don't need a lab test to do the right thing ... if you're sick you need to stay home."

At this point Hinshaw said they do not have the ability to write orders for everyone returning from abroad but she encourages community members to look out for each other.

Kenney encouraged people to spread the word and keep each other accountable, including snowbirds who may be returning to Alberta.

An additional \$500 million in funding was also announced Sunday. The province will give public health officials the resources they need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and keep Albertans safe, Kenney said.

Wait times for test results are around four days. Hinshaw said positive test results are followed up on immediately while negative results may take a little longer.

On Saturday, 10 new cases were confirmed. Two of those patients, both in their 60s, were admitted to intensive care, while the other patients were in isolation at home and are expected to make a full recovery.

Eight of those new cases have been confirmed to be related to travel or to a previously confirmed case.

On Sunday evening, a City of Edmonton news release announced that one of its employees has tested positive for novel coronavirus.

The case is travel-related and the person who tested positive is in self-isolation at home, interim city manager Adam Laughlin said in the news release

"The affected employee is not in a role that involves frequent contact with the public," Laughlin said.

Further details are expected at a news conference Monday.

More than 300,000 people had taken an online self-assessment test introduced on Friday to ease pressure on the province's 811 Health Link dial-in number, Hinshaw said.

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