

Alberta drops two-metre requirement as kids get ready for back to school ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

CALGARY (660 NEWS) – There seem to be more questions than answers as schools scramble to re-open with many people asking, are classrooms ready to let kids come back?

Students with the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) return to school Tuesday while the Calgary Catholic District starts on Wednesday.

A walk through at Henry Wise Wood High School on Friday showed desks were just under two metres apart.

However, Alberta's top doctor Dr. Deena Hinshaw issued a health order exempting schools from the two-metre rule, so long as they distance the desks as far apart as possible or make sure they don't face each other.

That order has been criticized by some, calling it too late and an attempt to hid information from the UCP.

On Monday morning Hinshaw responded to those concerns.

She said the order removing physical distancing requirements in classrooms was issued over the weekend but was not meant to hide information but ensure school boards knew about it before it came into effect.

However, I understand the concerns, especially as we move forward quickly to ensure accurate information for Albertans. Effective immediately, my goal will be to post new orders Monday through Thursday and I will share when they have been posted via social media. (2/8)

— Dr. Deena Hinshaw (@CMOH_Alberta) August 31, 2020

However, she understands people are concerned, and moving forward, she will try to post new health orders Monday to Thursday.

Hinshaw said she will also talk about about this during the COVID-19 update on Monday.

Medina Moussa with Support our Students (SOS) said the first few weeks of school will feature less traditional learning and more about COVID-19.

"They'll (teachers) be left to have to deal with a variation of students in different places in terms of how they and their families have been coping with this pandemic. I think there's going to be a lot of focus on safety protocols these first few weeks and not academics."

She added the world is being placed on the shoulders of teachers right now.

"I think anxieties are running pretty high. There's inadequate PPE. They're wondering about the anxieties of their students, I know many of them are excited to be back at school but this first day of school will be like any other."

Hinshaw said it's natural to feel nervous, excited and even anxious as it's the first time parents and students are going back to school during a pandemic.

Many students and teachers have not been in school since classes were cancelled last March.

One school in Alberta has already delayed its start due to a positive case of COVID-19.

The Prairie River Junior High School in High Prairie said on Sunday it was delaying re-entry for students but no exact date has been given

yet.

It's not clear if it was a student or staff member who caught the virus.

The CBE said it has a staggered re-entry plan for all students returning to class but Moussa said parents should have been given more notice about that.

She added the province could have done more to ensure the safety of students and ease anxieties.

"I think they are going to rise to the challenge and make the best of the situation but let's not kid ourselves, the situation is not good and it could have been better. We've had five months to put adequate plans in place and the lack of leadership has prevented that from happening."

Region: Alberta ^[4]

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