10% Absenteeism in Schools

School staff have an important role in helping control the spread of illness by carefully watching students and attendance systems for signs of illness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has required that changes be made to the way symptoms of communicable diseases are managed in schools. Below are important changes to AHS processes for absenteeism in schools.

Outbreak identification: Typical process before the COVID-19 pandemic
Prior to the 2020/21 school year, an outbreak may have been suspected in a school when student absence due to illness was equal to or greater than 10%. School administrators were asked to report these instances to their local public health team. AHS would then provide information and recommendations to assist school staff in preventing spread of illness, assess if any testing was needed, decide if an outbreak should be opened, and send letters of information to staff, students, and parents/guardians, if relevant.

Outbreak identification: Processes during the COVID-19 pandemic
During the 2020-21 school year, students and school staff are asked to complete a daily health screening and stay home if they are ill. Therefore, it is less likely that unknown illness will be identified through school attendance records.

What should school administrators do if they have questions about student illness?
- It is essential that school administrators and staff become familiar with Alberta’s K to 12 School Re-entry Guidance.
- In new instances of student absence due to illness equal to or greater than 10%, school administrators should call the Coordinated Early Identification and Response phone line at 1-844-343-0971.
- For absence due to illness equal or greater than 10% that extends consecutive school days, it is not necessary to make repeat calls to the phone line.

What will happen when school administrators call the CEIR phone line?
- A health professional will ask about the symptoms that are most common in students.
  - If symptoms are primarily respiratory, the school administrator will be asked to encourage testing for COVID-19 and given advice about other disease prevention strategies.
  - If symptoms are related to nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea, Environmental Public Health support may be offered to minimize the risk of spread or illness.
  - If illness is related to rash, Communicable Disease Control support will be offered to minimize the risk of spread or illness.