

Coronavirus: Montreal schools urge students who have been abroad to take precautions

Thousands of students are returning from March break travels abroad.

MICHELLE LALONDE, MONTREAL GAZETTE ([HTTPS://MONTREALGAZETTE.COM/AUTHOR/MICHELLELALONDE](https://montrealgazette.com/author/michellelalonde)) Updated: March 9, 2020

As thousands of students return from March break travels abroad, school boards, CEGEPs and universities are urging those who have been to risk zones to take special precautions.

The English Montreal School Board is asking staff and students who have recently travelled to certain countries and territories with coronavirus outbreaks to stay at home, whether they are exhibiting symptoms or not.

The EMSB issued a statement Sunday evening telling parents whose children have visited China, Iran, Hong Kong, South Korea, Italy, Japan or Singapore within the last two weeks to keep them

home from school, and to contact Info-Santé at 811. The same applies to staff members who have visited those countries.

“Info-Santé will provide the necessary instructions if quarantine applies to you,” the EMSB advised the parents of its 36,000 students in an update on Monday.

The EMSB is also asking parents to keep their children home if they exhibit flu symptoms such as cough, sore throat, runny nose and fever.

In that notice, EMSB director Ann Marie Matheson expressed sympathy for students from Westmount High School, whose March break trip to Europe was postponed at the last minute because of concerns about the virus. But recent developments in Europe, Matheson notes, “have demonstrated that decision was both prudent and warranted.”

The Commission scolaire de Montréal (CSDM), whose schools have more than 115,000 students, is not going quite as far. In a message to parents sent out Monday afternoon, the CSDM simply reminded parents that public health authorities are recommending that anyone coming back from those [risk areas \(https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html\)](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/latest-travel-health-advice.html) or who [has \(https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/symptoms.html\)](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/symptoms.html) symptoms — such as cough, fever or respiratory difficulty — should call Info-Santé at 811 before going to a clinic or hospital.

Most school boards are also passing on a letter from Quebec’s education department, which invites those with concerns about the virus to visit the website [Québec.ca/coronavirus \(https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/\)](https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/) or call the new information number set up by the department on Monday: 1-877-644-4545 between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.

The Lester B. Pearson School Board, which serves about 20,000 students, is also advising parents to check government websites for travel advisories and follow guidelines. That board has not had to cancel any school trips, although itineraries for several upcoming graduation trips in the spring might be modified, if necessary.

“We are keeping abreast of the situation on a daily basis and if there are any changes or guidance from the Quebec or Canadian government in terms of further countries that shouldn’t be travelled to or travel advisories, we will act on them immediately and we will update people as necessary,” said LBPSB spokesperson Jim Hendry.

The Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys is advising parents of its 75,000 students to review [measures to take on returning from travel abroad](https://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/ministere/salle-de-presse/communiqué-2057/) (<https://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/ministere/salle-de-presse/communiqué-2057/>), as outlined by Quebec’s public health department. Only those who have travelled to Hubei, China or to Iran are asked to self-quarantine. Those who have travelled to continental China, South Korea, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan and Singapore are to monitor their symptoms for two weeks and avoid places where it would be difficult to avoid others should symptoms appear.

McGill University is “carefully monitoring the situation” and following directives outlined by the Canadian government and public health authorities. “In accordance with the most recent recommendations, students, faculty and staff should continue their usual campus activities, unless they have flu symptoms and travelled to affected areas in the last 14 days or have been in close contact with someone who has, or if they have been directed to stay home by their health-care provider or by Info Santé 811,” McGill spokesperson Cynthia Lee said.

Concordia University is taking a similar approach and has created an [FAQ on Covid-19](https://www.concordia.ca/students/health/patient-resources/coronavirus.html) (<https://www.concordia.ca/students/health/patient-resources/coronavirus.html>) for its community and will update it as needed.

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