

CO2 levels high at Charlottetown school

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Air quality tests on some P.E.I. schools have shown high levels of carbon dioxide at West Kent school in Charlottetown.

The testing was done in advance of moving in students from two schools shut down by mould contamination. More than 600 students from Morell Consolidated and Spring Park in Charlottetown were out of school for almost two weeks while temporary space at six schools was prepared.

Part of that preparation was testing the air at the receiving schools. Air quality tests and visual inspection found them to be clear of mould, but West Kent School, which took in 60 kindergarten students from Spring Park, was found to have carbon dioxide levels of 2,972 parts per million in one test. That's approaching the 3,500 ppm considered by Health Canada to be the maximum acceptable level for long-term exposure.

In a news release, provincial chief health officer Dr. Heather Morrison said high carbon dioxide levels are not a major health concern.

"Carbon dioxide is a normal byproduct of respiration, or breathing," said Morrison.

"Elevated carbon dioxide levels for extended periods of time may affect concentration and cause fatigue. However, there are no known long-term health effects."

Schools with ventilation systems scored better on carbon dioxide tests. School officials are reminding staff at West Kent they should open windows four times a day to increase natural ventilation of the buildings. The problem there could become worse with more students in the school.

This is not the first time the Eastern School District has dealt with carbon dioxide problems in one of its schools. In 2009 there was a problem with the ventilation system at Glen Stewart School in Stratford. At Glen Stewart, they recorded carbon dioxide levels between 855 and 2,000 ppm. School safety consultant Joan Moore wrote in a report on the problem that concentrations as low as 600 ppm could lead to "occasional symptoms such as headaches, drowsiness, and stuffiness, as may be the case at this school."

Glen Stewart now has a computer system that controls carbon dioxide levels in every classroom.

The school district says it will conduct follow up testing at West Kent.

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