Victorian Chief Health Officer message to schools, early childhood centres and their communities

Term 1 is now fully in swing for 2021, which makes it even more important for every Victorian to play their part to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. We all want Victoria to continue to stay safe and stay open and we want our children to continue to learn at their school, kindergarten or other early childhood education centre.

Recently, we've seen some cases of COVID-19 emerge. The Department of Health is doing everything it can to prevent spreading in the community through locating close contacts, continued testing and wastewater monitoring.

Early childhood centres and schools have comprehensive COVIDSafe plans in place. This means that schools and centres have embedded the behaviours we learned in 2020 and are well placed to act quickly and respond to any identified risks.

I am confident this is reassuring to families, children and staff.

However, the importance of all Victorians remaining vigilant cannot be stressed enough.

It is vital that we all continue to stay home when unwell, get tested, perform regular hand hygiene, and cough into your elbow if you have to. I remind all staff, students, parents and families to wear a face mask when required and stay at least 1.5m apart from others when practical.

I also encourage you to promote and ensure testing whenever a child or staff member has any symptoms, no matter how mild. Getting tested and staying home until results are known remains critical to limiting the spread of COVID-19.

It is also important to get tested when it is recommended, for example, if you have visited an exposure site.

- The symptoms to watch out for are:
- loss or change in sense of smell or taste
- fever
- chills or sweats
- cough
- sore throat
- shortness of breath
- runny nose.

Continued vigilance to prevent the spread of COVID-19 ensures that schools and early childhood education centres remain safe for students and staff.

Adj Clin Prof Brett Sutton

Victorian Chief Health Officer