

The purpose of this guidance is to support schools to continue to provide safe teaching and learning environments for staff and students as schools transition back to on-site schooling.

## Message from the Victorian Chief Health Officer



As Victoria's Chief Health Officer, and as a member of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, and with the health, wellbeing and safety of students and staff front of mind, I fully endorse a return to

on-site schooling for all Victorian schools.

As you know, since the beginning of Term 2, most children have been learning remotely in order to limit the number of people moving around the state and to help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

This careful approach continues, and I trust that you have confidence in my view that it is safe for our community to have school students begin a phased return to classrooms.

I thank teachers, staff and families for their incredible efforts in helping deliver remote and flexible schooling and, in doing so, helping to flatten the curve of the pandemic.

These efforts, in addition to significant testing, mean we are now in a position to begin moving back to face-to-face teaching.

This is in addition to the available evidence that largely indicates that transmission between children in the school environment is low.

This growing evidence, coupled with low levels of community transmission in Victoria, means that the risk posed to staff and students returning to on-site schooling at this time is very low.

As we begin this transition, the following guidance provides some sensible steps schools can take.

Everyone in the Victorian community has a role to play in protecting themselves and keeping the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) suppressed.

Thank you for your incredible contribution to Victoria's response to coronavirus (COVID-19).

**Adj Clin Prof Brett Sutton**  
Victorian Chief Health Officer



## Actions for schools

Schools should consider a variety of strategies to support physical distancing and good hygiene practices to reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission within the practical limitations of a school environment. The following actions are to be considered, adapted and implemented as necessary according to the education setting and the individual needs of the staff, students and the wider school community.

### Attendance on-site

Perhaps the most important action school communities can take to reduce the risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19), is to ensure that any unwell staff, children and young people remain at home.

While the risk of transmission of the virus is very low, staff or students most at risk of severe illness should individually assess appropriateness for on-site attendance at this time with support from their medical practitioner.

As the main risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the school environment is between adults, it is important that visitors to school grounds are limited to those delivering or supporting essential school services and operations.

- All unwell staff and students must stay home.
- Parents/carers of students with complex medical needs (including those with compromised immune systems), should seek advice from the student's medical practitioner to support decision-making about whether on-site education is suitable, noting that this advice may change depending on the status of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Victoria. This is in line with the [DET Health Care Needs](#) policy.

- In line with other members of the community, teachers and staff may be at greater risk of more serious illness if they are infected with coronavirus (COVID-19) if they are:
  - aged 70 years and over
  - aged 65 years and over and have chronic medical conditions
  - of any age and have a compromised immune system
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and are aged over 50 with chronic medical conditions.

Such teachers and staff may be considered vulnerable and should take additional care to protect themselves and consider working from home. Also see DHHS [Fact sheet for 'at-risk' groups in the community](#).

- Visitors to school grounds should be limited to those delivering or supporting essential school services and operations (e.g. student health and wellbeing services, specialist curriculum programs, maintenance workers).
- Additional staff, including parent volunteers, should be discouraged from attending school at this time. Activities dependent on and involving parents (e.g. specialist programs, 1:1 reading) should be cancelled.
- Parent-teacher information sessions and interviews should meet physical distancing requirements of 1.5m between adults, or else be replaced with virtual alternatives.
- Activities that involve on-site attendance by students from different educational institutions (e.g. interschool sport or interschool debating) should not take place or be replaced, where possible, with virtual alternatives
- School assemblies, excursions, camps and other non-essential large gatherings must be postponed or adapted considering use of technology.



## Hygiene

Everyone can protect themselves and prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) by continuing effective hand hygiene. Enhanced hygiene measures should continue during the return to on-site teaching and learning.

- All staff and students should undertake regular hand hygiene, particularly on arrival to school, before and after eating, after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the toilet. This should be directed or supervised by staff where required.
- Where soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitiser should be provided in every occupied room.
- It is recommended that students do not drink directly from drinking fountains at this time. Instead they should bring their own water bottle for use (and refilling) at school.
- The Department of Education and Training *Students Using Mobile Phones policy* remains in place. Staff and students should be reminded to clean their phone regularly.
- Where relevant, ensure the highest hygiene practices amongst food handlers where these services are operating, as per the Department of Education and Training Safe Food Handling policy. Sharing of food should not occur.

## School arrival and departure

As the main risk of introducing coronavirus (COVID-19) to the school environment is from adults, close proximity between adult members of the school community should be avoided, particularly during school drop-off and pick-up.

- Schools should encourage staff and parents to observe physical distancing measures by not congregating in areas inside or around the school.
- Local school arrangements to practice physical distancing and minimise interaction of students and adults within the school and at school entry points may include:
  - staggered drop off and pick-up times to reduce the number of adults congregating at the school gate or outside classrooms
  - placing dots at the school gate to encourage spacing between adults
  - encouraging parents to enter the school grounds only when essential to do so and contacting the school by phone or email as required.

- Encourage non-contact greetings
- Schools should not conduct wide-scale temperature checking of students as there is limited evidence to demonstrate the value of such checks.

## Considerations for teaching and learning environments

Maintaining a physical distance of 1.5 metres will not always be practical in education settings. Physical distancing is most important between adults.

Reducing mixing between different cohorts (either classes or year levels) is recommended as a precautionary measure to minimise risk of spread of transmission and aid containment in the rare event of a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) on site.

- Promote fresh air flow indoors and maximise use of outdoor learning areas or environments with enhanced ventilation where possible and as practical depending on weather conditions.
- Mixing of staff and students between rooms should be avoided where possible.
- Local school arrangements to reduce mixing between students and staff from different classes or year levels outside of the learning environment may continue to be of use as precautionary measures and include:
  - staggering of break times and separating different classes or year levels when outdoors.
  - considering the order and pace in which classrooms are vacated.
  - organising student traffic in corridors and locker bays (e.g. dividing the corridor for traffic direction).
- Where multiple staff are required in a classroom, remind staff to maintain physical distancing from each other as much as practical.



## Considerations for offices and staff facilities

As the greatest risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the school environment is between adults, close proximity between staff should be avoided where possible and especially in offices and staff rooms.

- Workstations should be spaced out as much as possible, and the number of staff in offices limited. This might mean re-locating staff to other spaces (e.g. library or unused classrooms).
- In line with other workplaces across Victoria, remind staff to maintain physical distancing from each other as much as possible in the reception, staff room and offices.

## Cleaning and facilities management

Environmental cleaning, coupled with regular hand hygiene, remains important to reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission.

- Continued extension of routine environmental cleaning, including progressive cleaning throughout the day to ensure that risks of transmission are reduced for high-touch services. See [Access to cleaning supplies and services](#).
- Schools should consider the necessity of using shared items or equipment at this time. Such items may include shared computers, class sets of teaching and learning materials, musical instruments etc. Hand hygiene immediately before and after use of shared equipment is recommended. Risk can be further minimised by users of high-touch shared equipment wiping items down where appropriate, for example using a disinfectant/detergent wipe or cloth.

## Sport and recreation

In line with community advice, reasonable precautions are still advised to reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission in the context of sport and recreation.

- Playground equipment can be used, however students should be directed to practice hand hygiene before and after use.
- Swimming and aquatic facilities should not be used.
- Outdoor facilities are preferred for the purpose of physical education and recreational play. Where indoor facilities are used, please limit the number of students.
- Non-contact sports should be encouraged. Hand hygiene must be practised before and after use of any sporting equipment.

## Provision of routine care and first aid

Physical distancing is not practical when providing direct care. In this situation standard precautions, including hand hygiene, are important for infection control.

- Standard precautions are advised when coming in to contact with someone for the purpose of providing routine care and/or assistance (for example, the use of gloves for nappy-changing, toileting, feeding).
- Standard precautions as per the Department of Education and Training Infectious Disease policy and related policies should be adopted when providing first aid. For example, use gloves and apron when dealing with blood or body fluids/substances.
- Always wash hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser before and after performing routine care or first aid.
- Additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), for example face masks, is not required to provide routine care or first aid for students who are well, unless such precautions are usually adopted in the routine care of an individual student.



## Management of an unwell student or staff member

It is important that any staff member or student who becomes unwell while at school returns home. While it is unlikely that a staff member or student who is unwell with flu-like symptoms will have coronavirus (COVID-19) there are some sensible steps schools can take while a student awaits collection by a parent or carer as a precaution.

- Staff and students experiencing compatible symptoms with coronavirus (COVID-19), such as fever, cough or sore throat, should be isolated in an appropriate space with suitable supervision and collected by a parent/carer as soon as possible. Urgent medical attention should be sought where indicated. It is not suitable for an unwell student to travel home unsupervised.
- Where staff or students are experiencing compatible symptoms with coronavirus (COVID-19), the important actions to follow include hand hygiene, physical distance and (where possible) putting on a face mask. See DET [guidance for the use of Personal Protective Equipment in education](#).
- In the context of schools supporting students with complex health needs, if the care of an unwell child or young person is to be prolonged (for example, because it will take some hours for a parent to collect a child) and maintaining distance is not practical when providing direct care, gloves, gown and eye protection could be considered if available.
- Face masks should not be used in situations where an individual is unable to safely or practically tolerate a mask (for example, a child with complex medical needs including existing respiratory needs, and younger children).
- Health care plans, where relevant, should be updated to provide additional advice on monitoring and identification of the unwell child in the context of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- If a staff member is unsure whether a student is unwell it is advisable in the first instance to contact the parent/carer to discuss any concerns about the health status of the student, and taking a precautionary approach, request the parent/carer to collect their child if concerns remain. A trained staff member could take the temperature of the student, where appropriate, to support decision making. Gloves should be worn for the purpose of taking a temperature.

- Staff or students experiencing compatible symptoms with coronavirus (COVID-19) should be encouraged to seek the advice of their healthcare professional who can advise on next steps. A medical certificate is not required to return to an education setting after a period of illness, however staff and students should not return until symptoms resolve.
- Follow cleaning guidance according to the situation of the case. If a student spreads droplets (for example by sneezing, coughing or vomiting), clean surfaces immediately with disinfectant wipes while wearing gloves.

## Managing a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Department of Education and Training has comprehensive procedures in place with the Department of Health and Human Services to manage suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in schools.

- Contact the Department of Health and Human Services on 1300 651 160 to discuss what to do next if a student or staff member:
  - is a confirmed case
  - has been in close contact with a confirmed case.
- Schools should also inform the Department by making an [IRIS incident alert](#).
- Department of Health and Human Services defines 'close contact' as someone who has either:
  - had at least 15 minutes of face-to-face contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)
  - shared a closed space for more than two hours with someone who is a confirmed case.

Unless you have a student or staff member in one of the two above categories, you do not need to take further action, unless directed to do so.