

COVID-smart measures at school

A combination of layered safety measures – mask-wearing, rapid antigen testing (RAT), strongly encouraged vaccinations, ventilation, hygiene and cleaning – allows us to keep schools operational.

With COVID-19 and the flu circulating in the community, we will continue our layered COVID-smart measures for Term 3 to prioritise student and staff wellbeing, while keeping schools operational. The layered measures include strongly advising mask-wearing, rapid antigen testing (RAT), strongly encouraging vaccinations, maximising natural ventilation, hygiene and cleaning.

In certain circumstances Diocesan Offices and RI/MPJP schools may determine that additional COVID-smart measures are to be temporarily reintroduced or enhanced to act as a ‘circuit breaker’.

Masks

In response to NSW Health advice and the current COVID-19 situation in the state, the Minister for Education and Early Learning has strongly encouraged mask-wearing when indoors for all school-based staff and for all students, particularly for the first 4 weeks of Term 3.

Masks are an effective way to reduce the risk of transmission of respiratory viruses and infectious diseases, including COVID-19 and the flu. A 4-week mask-wearing ‘blitz’ will help to reduce the risk of transmission events in our schools and keep our schools operational to support our students’ learning.

Masks continue to be required for workers who support our students who are at greater risk of serious illness should they contract COVID-19 in specialist centres, support units and some mainstream classrooms.

Masks will continue to be required on school sites for anyone doing any of the following types of work:

- NDIS services
- ATSP services – drivers and assisted travel support officers
- education and/or support of a student who is at greater risk of serious illness should they contract COVID-19 in a specialist centre, support unit or mainstream setting, including:
 - school learning support officers
 - school counselling staff

- learning and support teachers
- early intervention staff
- itinerant support teachers
- assistant principals (hearing or vision)
- assistant principals learning and support
- support teachers transition
- classroom teachers
- allied health professionals engaged through the allied health pre-qualification scheme
- attendant carers engaged through third-party providers.

Masks continue to be mandatory on public transport. This applies to students aged 12 years and older, and staff when travelling to and from school and during school excursions by public transport or by chartered transport services.

In line with the latest advice from NSW Health, masks are recommended for students and staff who have recovered from COVID-19, completed their 7-day isolation period and are no longer showing symptoms for an additional 3 days (from days 8 – 10 after receiving a positive COVID-19 result).

Schools are asked to refer parent and carer enquiries to the NSW Government fact sheets for information on [safely managing COVID-19](#). Please do not provide specific advice as information can change.

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Rapid antigen testing

As part of the NSW Government’s focus on minimising disruptions to teaching and learning, the CSNSW will continue to support the use of rapid antigen tests (RATs) in schools throughout Term 3.

RATs will be sent to schools from Week 1 of Term 3. The delivery is expected to be completed within the first three weeks of term. This supply will contain 1 multipack of 5 RAT kits for every student and staff member in schools and early childhood education services, and at least 2 RAT kits for every student and staff member in specialist centres, support units and for Assisted Travel Support Officers.

Beyond the NSW Government’s provision of RATs, students and staff should continue to access PCR tests and store-purchased RATs when experiencing symptoms or when identified as a close contact.

Close contacts

Staff and students who are identified as close contacts are allowed to attend school, providing they follow certain guidelines.

Staff and students cannot attend specialist centres or support units as a close contact, and will be supported to work or learn from home.

Visitors on school sites

Visitors can attend schools and early childhood education and care (ECEC) services regardless of their vaccination status, in line with settings in the broader community. This includes:

- volunteers or staff operating uniform shops and canteens
- allied health partners for the wellbeing of students
- university and TAFE students completing their practicum or teacher training.

Visitors, including volunteers, allied health partners and staff providing professional learning who are close contacts should conduct a daily RAT and return a negative result before attending a school or ECE site. They must also wear a mask indoors at all times (except when eating or exercising) if they are 12 years old or over. Close contacts cannot attend specialist centres or support units. Schools should consider if meetings with teachers and activities with students can be held virtually.

Visitors are also required to advise the school that they are a close contact, if they are interacting with students, before they come on site.

Check-in

School staff are not required to use School Visitor Check-in to sign in daily for COVID-19 contact tracing purposes.

Schools can continue to use third-party digital sign-in systems to manage attendance administration tasks or continue to use their paper-based method for these tasks.

Cohorting

Schools do not need to keep students in their class or year cohort groups, as part of daily school operations

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Ventilation and physical distancing

Maximising natural ventilation is an effective method for minimising the spread of respiratory viruses including COVID-19 and flu and other illness and can be best achieved by opening doors and windows.

- To support thermal comfort, schools may use heating or cooling in conjunction with windows and doors remaining slightly open to continue to allow natural ventilation.
- Use outdoor spaces for events and activities as much as possible in order to maximise natural ventilation. Measures should be put in place to maximise ventilation when using indoor spaces, such as opening windows.
- Allowing a reasonable space between people will reduce the risk of transmission in those environments and also ensure people are more comfortable.
- Air purifiers may be deployed in schools. These purifiers could be located in areas where high levels of student and staff mixing occurs, such as staffrooms, internal canteens, student centres and music rooms. Air purifiers do not replace the need to maximise ventilation through open doors and windows, or the requirement to continue COVID-smart practices.

Hygiene and cleaning

- Encourage students and staff to wash their hands regularly with soap and water.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) correctly, as incorrect use can increase the risk of infection.
- Boosted day cleaning of schools may be implemented, focusing on target areas such as high-touch areas and other hard surfaces, door handles, lockers, light switches and handrails in stairways and movement areas.

Reducing the risk of illness this winter

All students, staff and their families should follow NSW Health's advice to reduce the risk of not only COVID-19, but also other illnesses that may affect schools this winter such as the flu. Schools should reinforce the following NSW Health messages with their communities:

- Stay home if unwell or showing even the mildest of symptoms
- Keep up to date with vaccinations – including the flu vaccine, which is available from your local GP, pharmacy or Aboriginal Medical Service
- Get tested immediately for COVID-19 if you become symptomatic and isolate until you receive a negative result and are symptom free
- Practice good hand hygiene by washing regularly with soap and water
- Take a RAT before visiting vulnerable loved ones or going to large gatherings and events.

Guidance for specific activities

Catholic Schools NSW has worked with NSW Health to develop advice on how to assess activities with a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 and apply appropriate safeguards.

Schools should also work with their Diocesan Office (systemic schools) or CSNSW (RI/MPJP schools) to discuss any concerns they may have about planning specific activities.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to cancel or postpone activities, such as school camps. Schools are encouraged to use the COVID-safe advice, the other resources available to them, and their judgment to make decisions that are in the best interests of the health and safety of their school community.

Outside of school hours, off-site or non-curriculum activities require additional parental consent and stronger COVID-19-smart risk mitigation protections.

Note: In certain circumstances some schools may temporarily introduce additional COVID-19 temporary measures, which may include postponing non-essential activities. This includes, but is not limited to, school camps and excursions to minimise transmission risks within the school setting.

Community use of school sites

Community use of school sites including community sports, playgroups, schools as community centres and for Parent and Friends Association meetings are permitted. The school should have plans in place to avoid interaction between the community users and school students and staff.

- Community use of school sites should use outdoor spaces and be held after hours where possible.
- Community use of school sites should follow [NSW Government rules](#).
- A Community Use Acknowledgement must be in place.
- Community users do not need to be vaccinated, unless required by their organisation. Parents, carers and other visitors participating do not need to be vaccinated.
- Community users during school hours must also check in as a school visitor.

Parents and friends' association meetings held outside of school sites

Staff invited to attend P&F meetings outside of the school site are asked to consider if their attendance can be virtual in the first instance. If they must attend in person, follow the [NSW Government rules](#).

Staff common rooms, meetings and school development days

Staff common rooms

Staff common rooms must be well ventilated, with windows open wherever possible. Strict personal hygiene protocols apply at all times. Physical distancing should be strongly encouraged.

Meetings, school development days and professional learning

- Consider whether the meeting or professional learning activity can take place online. Where professional learning cannot be conducted online, staff should implement layered risk mitigations when participating in any face-to-face professional learning activities.
- Professional learning and meetings in large groups should be conducted in well-ventilated spaces.
- Activities that require staff from different schools to meet together can be conducted online or face to face in line with the layered risk mitigation strategies.
- Schools can organise mandatory CPR and Anaphylaxis training for staff, including new staff, to complete face-to-face components, where they consider that the training may not be deferred.

COVID-19 response protocols

CSNSW is continuing to work closely with NSW Health and other relevant agencies when a positive COVID-19 case is identified to have an impact on schools.