

## Victorian schools and their communities



I would like to take this opportunity to welcome back the Victorian school community in 2021.

Following an incredible effort by students, staff, teachers, parents and carers last year, Victorian schools are well placed to safely commence the new school year. Schools will return to a largely normal program of activities, including welcoming parents and other vital members of the school community back into their grounds.

Throughout the pandemic, Victorian schools have rapidly adapted and successfully implemented measures to reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission in school environments. By embedding COVIDSafe principles in all its operations and reinforcing good behaviours throughout 2020, schools have created safe spaces, and are in a strong position to quickly respond to any coronavirus (COVID-19) risks that may emerge.

**Given the current very low risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission in the community, continued high rates of testing, wastewater monitoring, and continued observance of health and safety measures in schools; those with medical vulnerabilities or their carers can feel reassured that they can safely return to working and learning on site.**

While we have seen outbreaks emerge over the summer break, we have also witnessed our capacity to respond quickly to limit the impact of these outbreaks. Should community cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) increase again, I am confident that with COVIDSafe plans in place, alongside our ability to quickly identify and respond to cases – schools remain safe places for all staff and students. I also continue to be reassured by evidence that children are less impacted by the virus and are less likely to develop severe illness.

It is crucial, however, for everyone to remain vigilant – to stay home when unwell, get tested, perform regular hand hygiene, wear a mask when required and maintain physical distancing from others when practical. Schools should consider how they can continue to pursue strategies that contribute to reduced transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).

**Schools and parents continue to have an important role to promote and ensure testing when a child or staff member has any symptoms, no matter how mild, and then stay home. Getting tested and staying home until results are known, remains critical to limiting community transmission.**

**Adj. Clinical Prof. Brett Sutton**  
Victorian Chief Health Officer

