

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.

An update from the Victorian Chief Health Officer



As Victoria's Chief Health Officer, and as a member of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, the health, wellbeing and safety of students and staff remains front of mind.

As you know, we have seen an increase in the number of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases in metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, with a concerning number of these having been acquired through unknown transmission.

In order to significantly reduce the movement of more than 700,000 students and their families across metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire and to help slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), I have advised temporarily returning to a predominately remote learning model from Term 3.

For those continuing to receive on-site provision at mainstream and specialist schools, I want to reassure you that schools remain safe places for staff and students when sensible steps as outlined in this guidance are taken. I ask all Victorian school communities to protect themselves and others by following this advice.

The available data suggests that transmission in school settings is rare, and the risk to staff and students in both mainstream and specialist settings remains low, with health and safety measures in place.

The vast majority of cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) observed in schools involve the student or staff member acquiring the virus in the community, and these cases have been well contained though reactive and temporary closures.

With significant testing in place, I am confident in our ability to identify and respond appropriately when a student or staff member tests positive to coronavirus (COVID-19).

Reassuringly, evidence also continues to show that children are less impacted by the virus, they tend to have milder symptoms and are less likely to develop severe illness.

I once again thank teachers, staff, students and families for their incredible efforts during these challenging times, and with your support I am confident we can once again flatten the curve of the pandemic in Victoria.

Adj Clin Prof Brett Sutton
Victorian Chief Health Officer



Actions for schools

All schools, including specialist 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

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 in schools is low, staff or students most at risk of severe illness should continue to individually assess appropriateness for on-site attendance 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 is controlled, and in restricted areas limited to essential school services and operations.

- All unwell staff and students must stay home.
- Schools located in areas under 'Stay at Home' restrictions should conduct daily temperature checks of students on arrival (Following [Guidance for administering student temperature screening](#))
- 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.

Schools should control visitor access on site and record contact details for all visitors.

Hygiene

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

- All staff, students and visitors to schools 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 accessible 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.
- Sharing of food should not occur.
- *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.
- From 11:59pm on Sunday 2 August, a face covering will be mandatory whenever you leave home, wherever you live in Victoria. See [DHHS advice on face coverings](#) for information and guidance on use of face masks in education settings. It is not compulsory for staff to wear face coverings while teaching or caring for children, as they can interfere with their ability to clearly communicate with children. While teaching or caring for children, Staff can choose to wear masks face coverings if they wish.

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 within the school and at school entry points may include:
 - **multiple entry and exit points** or staggered drop off and pick-up times to reduce the number of adults congregating at the school gate or outside classrooms
 - **signs** at the school gate to encourage 1.5 metres physical distancing between adults
 - if additional space is required to support parents to physically distance at drop off and pick up, allowing parents to enter school grounds for a short period around these times.
- Encourage **non-contact greetings**.

Considerations for teaching and learning environments

Density restrictions of one person per 4m² in classrooms and corridors, and maintaining a physical distance of 1.5 metres between students during classroom activities 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 distance 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.

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.



Management of an unwell student or staff member

It is important that any staff member or student who becomes unwell while at school gets tested and 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 students should be 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 putting on a surgical mask (both staff and student where appropriate). 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 supervision or direct care; surgical mask, gloves, gown and eye protection are recommended to be worn by the staff member. See [DET guidance for the use of Personal Protective Equipment in education](#).
- 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. Children who are two years or younger must not wear face coverings as they are a choking and suffocation risk).
- 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.
- 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. Where staff or students have been tested, they must isolate until they receive their test result. Staff and students are generally not required to present a medical certificate stating they are fit to return to an education setting after a period of illness, however staff and students should not return until symptoms resolve. Staff continue to be required to present a medical certificate in accordance with personal leave policy for periods of absence on personal leave.
- 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 Education and Training by making an [IRIS incident alert](#) if a student or staff member is a confirmed case. You do not need to take further action, until directed to do so.