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**Operation Newstart COVID-19 Staff Safety Policy**

### Required actions for suspected cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in staff in schools

Staff members who are unwell must stay home.

‘Suspected case’ means a person who is displaying one or more coronavirus (COVID-19) symptom. Symptoms include fever above 37.5 degrees Celsius, night sweats, chills, acute respiratory infection (such as cough, shortness of breath, sore throat), loss of smell, and/or loss of taste.

As soon as practicable after becoming aware of a suspected case in a staff member, and that the staff member has attended on a school site whilst symptomatic, or 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms, the principal must take the following four actions.

1. **Direct the staff member to self-isolate, by travelling home immediately**. If immediate travel home is not possible, the staff member must be directed to self-isolate at school, in a separate room where possible, while wearing a face mask and remaining at least 1.5 metres from any other person, until they can travel home.
2. **Advise the staff member to be tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) as soon as practicable**, and to self-isolate while awaiting the result of that test.
3. Manage the risk posed by the suspected case, including by **ensuring high-touch areas frequently used by the staff member have been cleaned since they were last on site**. Please contact the VSBA Cleaning team if required on [cleaning@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:covidcleaning@education.vic.gov.au).
4. **Inform all staff on site** (including the Health and Safety Representative) to be **vigilant about the onset of symptoms.** If they become unwell, they must notify their principal, get tested and self-isolate. A [draft email](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame2.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/Coronavirus/suspected-case-template-email-staff.docx&action=default) and [further information on consulting with your staff](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/occupational-health-and-safety-management-system-ohsms/guidance/covid-19-employee-health) is available.

COVIDSafe principles for schools

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| Reinforce COVIDSafe behaviours\* | Create COVIDSafe spaces | Promote COVIDSafe activities | Respond to coronavirus  (COVID-19) risk\* |
| * Stay home when unwell\* * Practise good hygiene\* * Ensure physical distancing (1.5m) \* * Wear a face mask\* (students 12 years and older in secondary school, and staff.  Staff are not required to wear face masks while teaching, but can if they wish to do so) * Avoid interactions in enclosed spaces\* | * Make hand hygiene easy * Keep surfaces clean and implement enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection * Promote outdoor air ventilation and do not have air conditioners on recirculate | * Limit school access to outside visitors where possible * Reduce mixing between groups * Create workforce bubbles\* * Adapt, modify or defer higher-risk activities * Move activities outdoors where possible, weather permitting | * Keep records and act quickly if someone becomes unwell\* * Use personal protective equipment * Clean and disinfect appropriately if a staff member or student has been unwell at school * Manage individual risk |

1. Reinforce COVIDSafe behaviours

### Stay home when unwell

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 and students remain at home, even with the mildest of symptoms.

For further information for schools and to distribute to families see: [Managing illness in schools and early childhood services during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/covid-19/managing-unwell-students-covid19-factsheet.pdf).

### Practise good hygiene

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. Staff should direct or supervise young students or where required.

Students should bring their own water bottle for use at school, as students should not drink directly from drinking fountains at this time. Taps may be used to refill water bottles.

Sharing of food should not occur.

Use non-contact greetings (not shaking hands, hugging or kissing).

Ensure the highest hygiene practices amongst food handlers where these services are operating, as per the Department’s [Safe Food Handling Guidance](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/food-handling/guidance).

### Ensure physical distancing

A variety of strategies to support physical distancing among all students and staff should be pursued, where possible.

Staff **must** practise physical distancing between themselves and other staff members or adults to the extent that is reasonably practicable. Staff should physically distance themselves from students where appropriate and feasible.

A face mask provides protection when physical distance cannot be maintained. Physical distancing is not practical when providing direct care. In this situation a face mask together with standard precautions, including hand hygiene, are important for infection control.

Students **should** practise physical distancing where possible. Maintaining a physical distance of 1.5 meters will not always be practical in the school environment and may be particularly challenging in the younger years of primary school. In these contexts, a combination of health and safety measures should be utilised to reduce risk.

Density quotients of one person per 4m2 do not apply in classrooms and other spaces for the purposes of student use, including corridors and other shared areas*.*

Density quotients apply to staff areas such as staff lunchrooms and areas accessed by the public, such as reception areas.

Strategies that can be considered to support physical distancing include:

* the careful management of movement of adults through school reception and staff rooms, and timing of staff arrival and departure
* where multiple staff are required in a classroom, reminding staff to maintain physical distancing from each other as much as practical
* signage and rostering so that access to shared physical spaces and food preparation areas can be managed
* using larger spaces such as libraries for large classes such as English or Mathematics
* reminding students, staff and visitors including through signage, of the importance of physical distancing where possible
* reconfiguring class spaces where possible, using all available space in the school
* marking the floor indicating physical distancing in appropriate locations (e.g. canteens).

### Avoid interactions in close spaces

Space out staff workstations as much as possible and limit the number of staff in offices. This might mean re-locating staff to other spaces (such as the library or unused classrooms).

Consider opportunities to adapt indoor activities outdoors, for example having outdoor meetings, holding classes outside, encouraging staff and students to eat outside.

Use signage to promote physical distancing in more confined spaces such as locker bays, changing rooms and canteens.

For activities occurring outdoors, schools should follow the Outdoor Activities guidance in the [Occupational Health and Safety Management System](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/hrweb/safetyhw/Pages/ohsmgtsystem.aspx) and support staff and students to use a combination of sun protection measures when UV levels are 3 or above.

### Face masks in schools

All school-based staff must wear face masks at school, and when travelling to and from school. Schools must ensure that staff wear face masks when required.

A face mask that covers the nose and mouth is now the only permitted type of face covering. Face shields, scarves or bandanas do not meet these requirements.

Teachers and education support staff are not required to wear face masks while teaching, but those who wish to do so, can. Teachers must wear face masks in other areas of the school when not teaching (for example, in the staffroom, on yard duty and when providing first aid or taking temperatures), and when travelling to and from school.

Health, wellbeing and inclusion staff are required to wear face masks, unless an exemption applies, including the need for ‘clear enunciation or visibility of their mouth’ (for example, when undertaking a speech therapy intervention or working with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing).

#### Students

Secondary school students aged 12 years and over must wear a face mask while at school and while travelling to and from school.

Students who attend primary school for on-site supervision, including students in Prep to Year 6 who attend a P-12 school, are not required to wear a face mask. Students who are aged 12 or over by Year 6 who are attending primary school are not required to wear face masks at school.

Some students and staff are exempt from these requirements. This includes students who are over the age of 12 and are unable to wear a face mask due to the nature of their disability. This also includes students or staff who have a medical condition, such as problems with their breathing, a serious skin condition on the face, a disability or a mental health condition.

#### Breaks

Face mask breaks are allowed for staff and students during the day, but they should be kept brief, when seated outdoors having lunch and physically distanced, and ideally used in conjunction with staggered lunch breaks to limit mixing between class groups.

#### Parents and carers

Parents and carers are required to wear face masks whenever they leave the house, including for school drop-off and pick-up. If they are travelling in a car alone, or only with members of their household, they do not need to wear a face mask.

#### More information

Schools must display information and signage at school entrances and in communal areas such as staff rooms as reminders for staff to wear face masks when not teaching. Posters are available in the [communications support pack.](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/production.aspx#/app/content/3284/)

School staff should refer to the Department [guidance for the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in education](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/Guidance-for-the-use-of-PPE-in-education-settings.docx&action=default) to determine when additional PPE is required and for information on the correct and safe use of PPE.

#### Supplies

All schools have been provided with supplies of single-use face masks and reusable face masks. Single-use face masks should be made available to any person on site who requires a face mask, including students, staff and visitors. For more information see: [Face mask allocations for Term 4.](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/school.aspx#/app/news/detail/4204/)

#### Managing safe school arrival and departure including multiple entries and staggered starts

To ensure consistency with physical distancing measures, students and families will not be permitted to congregate at the school gate before or after school and will be required to maintain 1.5 metres between each other as far as is practicable at the start and end of the school day.

Schools must implement actions to:

* reduce the number of adults congregating outside the school at any one time, including parents and carers at peak times such as drop-off and pick-up
* reduce the mixing amongst different year levels, especially in large secondary schools where there may be congestion at peak times, including the start and finish of the school day
* where congestion is a risk, schools must implement strategies such as multiple entry/exit points or staggered start/finish times for different year levels
* decisions will be informed by local circumstances, school layout, design and street frontage and will differ from school to school.

Specific strategies for consideration include:

* opening as many entries and exit points to the school as is safe, and allocating staff to ensure students are safely supervised, and students and parents feel confident with the arrival/departure from school
* staggering start and finish times by groups of grades or year levels (for example, junior/middle/senior), while also enabling siblings to arrive and leave together at the same time and be safely supervised while on the school site
* for secondary schools in metropolitan areas these strategies can also support reduced congestion at public transport hubs
* advising parents to avoid or minimise time in or around the school grounds
* liaison with local councils about desired alterations to crossing supervision.

Schools must communicate the strategies in place to parents through local signage and communications to school communities to remind staff, students and families of the need for behaviours that support physical distancing. Posters and a parent letter are available in the [communications support pack](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/Pages/production.aspx#/app/content/3284/).

#### Temperature screening

Based on the advice of the Acting Deputy Chief Health Officer, given the current levels of community transmission in Victoria, mandatory temperature testing of all students on arrival to schools will not be required in Term 4.

However, should community transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) increase, temperature checking may be reintroduced for some schools. 

#### 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 into contact with someone for the purpose of providing routine care and/or assistance (for example, the use of gloves for nappy-changing, toileting or feeding).

Standard precautions as per the Department’s [Infectious Diseases policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/infectious-diseases/policy) and related policies should be adopted when providing first aid. For example, use gloves and an 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.

1. Create COVIDSafe spaces

### Make hand hygiene easy

Hand sanitiser should be made available at entry points to classrooms. Age-appropriate education and reminders about hand hygiene should be provided.

If soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitiser that contains at least 60 percent alcohol should be made accessible.

### Keep surfaces clean

As per the ‘Cleaning and personal hygiene products’ section of this Operations Guide, extended and increased cleaning arrangements have been introduced and will continue. This involves progressive cleaning throughout the day to keep surfaces clean and reduce risks of transmission from high-touch services.

Schools should consider the necessity of using shared equipment at this time. Such items may include shared computers, class sets of teaching and learning materials, and musical instruments. If used, strict hand hygiene should be followed before and after use. Risk can be further minimised by users wiping down items where appropriate, for example using a disinfectant/detergent wipe or cloth.

There is no requirement for books to be placed aside for a given period after use or if loaned to students.

Consider adjusting how staff and students interact within the built environment to reduce contact with certain surfaces. For example, a simple measure such as keeping a door open will reduce the need for multiple people to touch the door handle.

Consider use of plexiglass as a physical barrier at school reception and canteen where practical and feasible.

### Promote outdoor air ventilation

Schools are strongly encouraged to increase fresh air into indoor spaces whenever possible and to maximise the use of outdoor learning areas or environments.

Where possible, air recirculation should be eliminated or minimised by setting air conditioning units to use external air rather than recycling.

Door jambs should be used where possible to keep air circulating and avoid the need to close and open doors.

1. Promote COVIDSafe activities

### Limit school access: Visitors to schools and school tours

#### All schools

Visitors to school grounds must be limited to those delivering or supporting essential school services and operations (such as student health and wellbeing services, and safety, cleaning and maintenance workers).

To support contact tracing, schools must keep a record of all staff, students and visitors who attend on site for more than 15 minutes. Schools must record the name, contact details, date, and time of attendance at school, as well as the areas of the school that the person attended. Schools can use existing mechanisms such as visitor sign-in procedures, student attendance records and staffing rosters to record this information.

Additional staff, including parent volunteers, must not attend school at this time.

Parent-teacher information sessions and interviews must continue to be replaced with online and video alternatives.

Schools must not conduct on-site school tours for prospective students and their families at this time. Exemptions can be considered at a local level to support essential educational planning and decision-making for students with disability or highly complex needs.

Visitors to school grounds must comply with physical distancing and face mask advice set out in this Operations Guide, and practise good hand hygiene.

1. Respond to coronavirus (COVID-19) risk

### 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 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 or 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 face mask (both staff and student where appropriate). See the Department’s [guidance for the use of Personal Protective Equipment in education](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/Guidance-for-the-use-of-PPE-in-education-settings.docx&action=default).
* 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, the staff member should wear surgical face mask, gloves, gown and eye protection. See the Department’s [guidance for the use of Personal Protective Equipment in education](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/sites/i/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/sites/i/Shared%20Documents/Guidance-for-the-use-of-PPE-in-education-settings.docx&action=default).
* Face masks should not be used in situations where an individual is unable to safely or practically tolerate a face mask (for example, a child with complex medical needs including existing respiratory needs. Children who are two years or younger must not wear face masks 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 or carer to discuss any concerns about the health status of the student, and taking a precautionary approach, request the parent or 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 has comprehensive procedures in place with DHHS to manage suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in schools.

* Contact the Department by calling 1800 126 126 to report an IRIS incident alert if a student or staff member tests positive to coronavirus (COVID-19). Schools do not need to take further action, until directed to do so.
* The Department will notify WorkSafe on behalf of the affected school.

WorkSafe may be in contact with the affected school to ensure the school is following the health and safety guidance outlined in this document and has implemented their COVID-19 Safety Management Plan. Please contact the OHS Advisory Service (1300 074 715) for support in managing occupational health and safety matters