

# Operations Guide

Victorian government schools

From Monday 31 January 2022



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# 1 Revised operational advice for schools

## 1. Victoria's Back-To-School plan

The measures set out in the Victorian Government's Back-To-School plan will ensure every possible effort is made to ensure staff and students are safe and that schools remain open.

The plan maintains the importance of the 3Vs: Ventilation, Vaccination and Vital COVIDSafe steps and introduces some new measures.

# Victoria's Back-to-School Plan

Education and Training

**What's new:**

**Free rapid antigen testing**

- more than 14 million rapid antigen tests to be delivered to schools and early childhood education and care settings
- twice-weekly voluntary testing at home
  - o primary school students and staff
  - o secondary school students and staff
- five-times-weekly voluntary testing at home
  - o specialist school students and staff

**Enhanced support to keep schools open and safe**

- extra staff ready to step in where essential school staff are unable to work
- updated procedures and notifications to families when there are COVID-19 cases
- extra planning and support for school leadership

**Continued COVIDSafe measures: the 3Vs**

**Vaccination**

- staff required to be vaccinated or medically exempt
- more than 90% of children age 12 and over are now vaccinated
- roll-out of vaccinations for children aged 5 to 11 through state vaccination hubs, pop-up school vaccination sites and in-reach grants

**Ventilation**

- delivery of 51,000 air purifiers to schools before day one of Term 1

**Vital COVIDSafe steps**

- physical distancing
- face masks
- regular hand hygiene
- testing

**Keeping schools open and as safe as possible**

- remote learning only considered as a localised, short-term, last-resort option

Updated: 22 January 2022

22-017

## 2. Rapid antigen testing

Free rapid antigen tests will be made available for all staff and students in Victorian schools for the first 4 weeks of Term 1 2022. Rapid antigen testing will be voluntary for all primary, secondary and specialist school students and staff.

Table 1: Summary of rapid antigen testing recommendations for schools

Category	Recommended rapid antigen testing schedule
Primary school staff and students	Twice weekly (school days)
Secondary school staff and students	Twice weekly (school days)
Specialist school staff and students	Five times a week (school days)

## Distribution of test kits to schools

The Department will distribute rapid antigen test kits directly to schools for the commencement of Term 1 2022. Schools should inform parents/carers as soon as tests are available for collection.

Tests will be provided in packs of 5 individual tests. Parents/carers should collect one pack for each child at the start of week one and one pack for each child at the start of week 3. Where parents/carers are unable to attend the school to collect the tests, a pack can be provided directly to a student to take home.

Students and staff will do the tests at home and must report any positive test results to their school.

If staff or students receive a positive test result at any time, they must report this through the Department of Health system ([Rapid antigen tests | Coronavirus Victoria](#)) or via the coronavirus hotline at 1800 675 398.

Students (or their parents) must also report a positive result to their school, either through the VicEd COVID [portal](#) or by phone or written notification; this is so the school can support them, record that they will be absent while in 7-day isolation, and let the rest of the school community know there has been a positive case onsite and that they should monitor for symptoms.

**Staff must report a positive result to their school using [EduPay](#), on the day they received a positive test result.**

All students and staff who return a positive result from a rapid antigen test should also follow the latest advice at <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/rapid-antigen-tests>.

Information about how to do a test, including a how-to video translated into 33 languages, is [available online](#).

## 3. COVIDSafe Plan

The [Safety Management Plan for COVID-19 \(COVIDSafe Plan\)](#) applies to all schools, outlines the key health and safety risks, and links to the latest guidance. Principals should ensure that staff are aware of their school's COVIDSafe plan prior to students returning to school.

In conjunction with this Operations Guide, it sets out the approach for managing safety risks in schools in accordance with the minimum requirements for COVIDSafe Plans.

The COVIDSafe Plan has been updated to align with the changes to the advice set out in this Operations Guide. Schools must ensure that a copy of the COVIDSafe Plan is available to provide to any Authorised Officers or WorkSafe Inspectors who request a copy.

The Department's [OHS Advisory Service or local Regional OHS Support Officers](#) can help tailor the plan to individual school needs and link schools with health and wellbeing supports to promote mental health and wellbeing for staff and safe work practices remotely and at school sites.

## 4. Management of suspected cases of COVID-19 in schools

A 'suspected' or 'symptomatic' case means a person who displays any [COVID-19 symptoms](#).

As soon as practicable after becoming aware of a suspected case in a staff member or student – and if that person has attended onsite while displaying symptoms, or 48 hours before they developed symptoms – the principal must take the following actions.

1. Let the person know they need to follow guidelines in the [Testing Requirements for Contacts and Exposed Persons](#). If applicable, the effected person/s should follow the COVID-19 RAT procedure, which recommends a symptomatic person in a workplace takes a COVID-19 test.

2. If the symptomatic person is confirmed to have COVID-19, the principal must follow the steps under the below section, *Management of confirmed cases and household contacts at school*.

## 5. Management of confirmed cases and household contacts at school

### Updated approach to managing a confirmed case of COVID-19 in schools

Where a student or staff member is identified as a positive case, individual education contact tracing will end. The revised process is set out below.

#### Principal actions: identification and notification

1. Parents/carers should complete the [RA Test portal](#) if a student tests positive to COVID-19 (via a PCR or rapid antigen test). Where a parent/carer informs the school by phone or written notification, the school should complete the [VicED COVID tool](#). Schools are no longer required to make an IRIS report for positive COVID cases. An [EduSafe Plus report](#) is only required if the school is impacted by COVID-19 related hospitalisation or death of a member of the school community. A user guide on how to complete this report is available on the 'Knowledge Base' in EduSafe plus.
2. Students who report a positive result must isolate for seven days and not attend school during that period.
3. Where a student is a household contact of a positive case (that is, they have spent more than four hours with someone who has COVID-19 inside a house, accommodation, or care facility) they must inform the school and isolate for seven days and not attend school during that period.
4. Staff must report the result of a positive test and request leave through [EduPay](#) portal. Staff who report a positive result must isolate for seven days and not attend school during that period.
5. Where a staff member is a household contact of a positive case (that is, they have spent more than four hours with someone who has COVID-19 inside a house, accommodation, or care facility) they must inform the school and isolate for seven days and not attend school during that period, unless they are attending under a provided exemption (see section 7).
6. Principals must notify the school community through a daily email (where applicable) when a student or staff member has (or multiple students or staff members) have returned a positive COVID-19 test result and had attended the school. The notification should include:
  - Dates of attendance
  - Affected group/cohort/year levels
  - Any relevant extracurricular activitiesThe notification can be provided to only the affected group/cohort/year level or to the whole school.
7. Ensure that staff or students refrain from returning to school if they remain symptomatic, unless it is known that their symptoms are caused by an underlying health condition or medication.
8. The Department will launch a new self-serve template portal for principals to use in the event of a positive case associated with the school. Each template package will contain a message to parents/carers, a message to staff, and website/social media wording. The portal will be accessed through the [intranet](#); templates will be online before Monday 31 January.

In the event of multiple positive cases at a school, the Department of Health (DH) will work with the relevant regional office to determine the most appropriate response and any additional actions that should be taken.

Schools must treat health information, including an individual's vaccination status or diagnosed medical condition (including positive COVID-19 test results) in accordance with the Schools' Privacy Policy. COVID-19 diagnoses and vaccination statuses are not to be shared or discussed unless the individual (or their parent/carer) provides consent, or unless schools are legally obliged or authorised to do so (for example, to comply with a Pandemic Order). Further guidance on the handling of health care information can be found on PAL under [Privacy and information sharing – Health care information](#).

## Staff leave

Infectious diseases leave for any required quarantine period may be approved in circumstances where there is evidence from a medical practitioner available in accordance with the [Infectious diseases leave](#) policy for the teaching service, or, schools may seek advice from Schools People Services at [internal.people.services@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:internal.people.services@education.vic.gov.au) in circumstances where that evidence is not available.

Table 2: Summary of student and staff scenarios

Scenario	Required actions for the student/family	Required actions for the school
<p>A student or staff member tests positive to COVID-19, either through RA test or PCR test</p>	<p>Isolate at home or in private accommodation for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and <b>do not attend school</b> during this period.</p> <p>Inform the school, that they have tested positive to COVID-19.</p> <p>A negative test is not required to return to school following completion of 7 days of isolation.</p> <p>Follow the <a href="#">Checklist for COVID cases</a>.</p>	<p>The school must notify DET of positive student cases via the <a href="#">Vic Ed COVID Tool</a>.</p> <p>Staff members must report a positive test result and submit a leave request via eduPay. See <a href="#">COVID-19 Leave Management Guidance</a> for details.</p> <p>The school should notify school community that there has been a case at the school using the communication templates available.</p>
<p>A student or staff member is a household contact or house-like contact*.</p> <p><i>You have spent more than four hours with someone who has COVID-19 inside a house, accommodation, or care facility.</i></p>	<p>Notify the school that they are a household or household-like contact.</p> <p>Follow the <a href="#">Checklist for COVID contacts</a>.</p> <p><b>Students</b> must quarantine for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and <b>must not attend school</b> during this period.</p> <p><b>Staff members</b> must quarantine for 7 days</p>	<p>No further action.</p>

Scenario	Required actions for the student/family	Required actions for the school
<i>Contact at school is not included in this definition, unless contact has occurred in a school-based residential setting, e.g. school camp or boarding school.</i>	(inclusive of weekends) and <b>must not attend school</b> during this period unless a <b>critical work exemption</b> has been agreed (see Page 9, <i>Exemptions for staff who are household contacts</i> ).	
A student or staff member has been in contact with a case of COVID-19, including at school or at work.	<p>If <b>asymptomatic</b>, students and staff should continue to attend school and monitor for symptoms.</p> <p>If <b>symptomatic</b>, all students/staff must stay/return home, take a rapid antigen test, or get a PCR test if a rapid antigen testing kit unavailable.</p> <p>On receipt of a negative test result, and if well enough, the student/staff member can return to school.</p> <p>If staff/students are too unwell to attend school, usual leave/absence policies apply.</p> <p>Follow the <a href="#">Checklist for COVID contacts</a>.</p>	<p>No further action.</p> <p>The school is not required to seek rapid antigen test results from the students or staff unless a positive test is returned.</p>

## 6. Enhanced principal supports

In response to the rapidly changing COVID-19 situation, and in recognition of the pressures placed on school leadership teams during outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools, the Department has increased support for school leadership teams.

### Managing COVID-19 in schools

A state-wide COVID-19 School Support and Response Team will be established to support principals and schools to manage COVID-19 related issues impacting on the school.

This will include a team of recently retired experienced principals who will be available to provide short-term support to school leaders. Engagement of an experienced principal will be facilitated by the region on request from a school principal.

## 7. Staffing arrangements

It continues to be the principal's responsibility to make the school-based decisions required to deliver education objectives, in accordance with the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017, including staff consultation.

Any decision to move to remote and flexible learning can only be used as a last resort and must be approved by the Regional Director or their delegate.

All school staff are expected to work onsite, except for medically vulnerable staff and staff required to quarantine.

All school staff who perform work at Victorian government schools are required to comply with the vaccination directions outlined in [COVID-19 Vaccinations – Teaching Service and School Council Employees](#).

A staff member who does not meet the vaccination requirements will not be assigned alternative duties in place of onsite duties.

## 8. Managing staff absences

Schools should apply the following steps to manage staff absences.

### Step One

- Use normal available staffing arrangements, to cover staff absences. Grade splitting should be minimised to limit the mixing of students across cohorts. Where necessary as a temporary measure, classes can be combined in a large space – for example, a hall, where supervision requirements can be maintained by teachers and support staff.
- Engage CRTs and utilise the new [Job Opportunity Pool](#) staff. The new 'Job Opportunity Pool' staff will be staff who can be deployed on a fixed-term basis and at short notice to assist with daily school operations, including face-to-face teaching, classroom and student support (including allied health), or administrative assistance.
- Reschedule staff intensive activities such as camps and excursions.

### Step Two

- Utilise staff who are eligible and available for the critical worker exemption (see following Section: *Exemptions for staff who are household contacts*) by mutual agreement.

### Step Three

- Only on the advice of the Department of Health and with the approval of the Regional Director, implement short term delivery of remote and flexible learning for specified classes/year level cohorts while maintaining onsite provision of learning for vulnerable children and children of essential workers.

### Exemptions for staff who are household contacts

School staff are eligible for an exemption from household contact home isolation requirements to allow them to attend their workplace to support the delivery of essential services.

Under the conditions of the exemption, school staff who are asymptomatic close contacts may return to work during the home isolation period, if it is necessary for continuity of operations of the

school and if other options have been exhausted, subject to strict infection prevention and control requirements being met.

To be eligible to attend school in these circumstances, school staff will have first notified their principal of their status as a household contact. Critically, both the staff member and their principal must agree to the staff member returning to the workplace. Staff will not be pressured to attend in any circumstance and remain free to take up the option or not.

Under these settings, exempt teachers can teach as usual. School staff who are household contacts will, however, also need to take the following steps when attending school during their isolation period:

- undertake a daily rapid antigen test for five days and return a negative result prior to attending work each day and report the result on EduPay daily (tests will be provided by the school)
- always wear a mask, including while teaching and in the company of others, except for when eating or drinking. Using a P2/N95 mask, or TGA-approved P2-equivalent mask, is strongly recommended.
- not enter shared break or work areas including staff rooms
- when travelling to and from work the staff member must not carpool and should, where possible, avoid public transport
- where possible, work in areas where transmission risk is lower (outside, where possible and safe, or in large, well-ventilated spaces)
- other than when attending school, staff must quarantine in accordance with public health requirements

Schools will be supplied with rapid antigen tests and P2/N95 masks, or TGA-approved P2-equivalent masks to provide to staff who are working in this category.

## 9. Staff who may be medically vulnerable to COVID-19

Some people are at greater risk of more serious illness with COVID-19. See [People at higher risk of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) for further information.

Employees should seek advice from their medical practitioner about working onsite. Where the employee is unable to work onsite and wants to work remotely or take personal leave, they should provide a medical certificate.

Where an employee's medical practitioner's advice is that they are unable to work onsite, schools should provide remote work if:

- the employee provides a medical certificate setting out the recommendation from their medical practitioner, and;
- the principal forms a view that it is reasonable, practicable and appropriate for the employee to work remotely.

Where remote work is not available, the employee can access leave available to them or return to duty once the medical advice is that it is safe for them to do so.

Staff who are living with or caring for elderly or chronically ill relatives or household members should seek advice from the medical practitioner of the person for whom they are caring to determine if they can work onsite or should work remotely. They should provide a medical certificate if they are seeking to access personal leave. [The Medical Advisory Service](#) is a specialised support service for principals to help them fulfil their responsibilities in relation to employee health.

## 10. Student attendance

All students are expected to attend onsite unless they are formally registered as being home-schooled. Parent preference is not an approved reason for students to be absent due to COVID-19.

Students who are required to isolate or quarantine should be supported in the same way as students with an extended absence due to illness or injury, with learning materials provided to support their continued learning. Schools are not expected to provide a full remote learning program in these circumstances.

## 11. Students who may be medically vulnerable

Schools must ensure students with medical needs have an up-to-date [Student Health Support Plan](#) and accompanying condition-specific health management plan (such as an [Asthma Action Plan](#)), based on medical advice from the student's medical or health practitioner, and consultation with the student and parents and carers.

Please refer to the [Health Care Needs](#) policy for further information on the student health support planning process. For additional information to support decision-making, refer to:

- [Asthma Australia](#)
- [Royal Children's Hospital – advice for respiratory patients](#)
- [JDRF – Coronavirus and children with T1 diabetes.](#)

## 12. QR codes and visitors to schools

**The use of Service Victoria QR codes for electronic record-keeping continues to be mandatory in all schools.**

	Need to check in	Do not need to check in
<b>Visitors and volunteers working on school site</b> (including contractors, external department staff and building and maintenance staff)	✓	
<b>Parents who enter school buildings when on school site</b>	✓	
<b>Staff, including pre-service teachers on placement</b>		✓
<b>Students</b>		✓
<b>Parents who come onto school grounds for drop-off or pick-up, but do not enter buildings</b>		✓

Schools can allow parents to enter buildings onsite for student pick-up and drop-off if there are QR code locations for parents to check in. Where this is not possible, schools should not allow parents to enter buildings for pick-up and drop-off.

Further information about QR code set-up can be found online, refer to [Register to use the Victorian Government QR Code Service](#).

### **COVIDSafe requirements for visitors and volunteers**

Visitors and volunteers performing work on school sites (both inside and outdoors) must have had at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine or have a valid medical exception.

Schools must advise visitors and volunteers they must adhere to COVIDSafe requirements: physical distancing, face mask requirements, cough etiquette, and good hand hygiene.

More information about the collection of vaccination information from visitors and volunteers on school sites is available at [COVID-19 Vaccinations – Visitors and Volunteers on School Sites : Policy | education.vic.gov.au](#), including a template register that schools can use for recording vaccination information during visitor and volunteer sign-in.

## **13. Other school and curriculum settings**

### **VCE/VCAL/VET provision in schools, TAFEs, non-school senior secondary providers and other training organisations**

Students can participate in face-to-face VCE or VCAL classes, including VET studies, where these are held at TAFEs, RTOs, non-school senior secondary providers, or schools.

### **Tech Schools, KIOSC and Science and Mathematics Specialist Centres**

Tech Schools, KIOSC, Stem Centre of Excellence, and Science and Mathematics Specialist Centres will continue onsite learning for all students.

### **Community Language Schools**

Community Language Schools will operate with face-to-face learning on school and non-school sites. Advice on the operation of Community Language Schools on non-school sites has been provided through Community Languages Victoria.

### **Victorian School of Languages**

Victorian School of Languages will continue face-to-face learning

### **Mobile Area Resources Centres (MARC) or Mobile Art and Craft Centres (MACC)**

MARCs and MACCS are permitted to attend schools, with shared and high-touch items to be cleaned regularly. All staff must be vaccinated to attend onsite.

## **14. School buses**

**School bus services** across the state will resume normal operations for the start of the school year. The Department's Student Transport Unit, in conjunction with the Department of Transport, will make every effort to continue to provide school bus services. However, staff shortages may result in the cancellation of bus services at short notice. Where this occurs, the Department's Student Transport Unit will support schools with communications to families and return services to normal operation as soon as practicable.

School Bus Services will continue to receive additional cleaning at the completion of each journey to maintain a clean bus fleet.

Bus staff, adult travellers and students are required to wear face masks in accordance with health directions.

Students are not required to check-in via QR code when travelling on private school buses or disability transport services.

School bus services **are required** to keep accurate records of students and staff (including drivers) who travel on buses For more information, refer to <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/school-bus-services>

## 15. Community use of school facilities

### Use of school facilities by the community

School facilities can be used by the community, including play equipment, and for external hire.

Schools are permitted to allow external providers to use or hire school facilities.

When hiring out school facilities, schools are required to following the [PAL policy](#) regarding vaccination and visitors to schools.

If an external party is using school facilities during school hours, there should be no mixing between external parties and school staff and students (for example, a swim school should have **exclusive use** of a school pool and change room for the period of use).

When unsure, providers should be directed to the Victorian government [Sector guidance](#) to confirm CovidSafe requirements.

Table 2: Summary of facility use by community and sports groups

External organiser	Exclusive use of premise or facility*	Proof of vaccination requirements	Collection of vaccination information
<b>Community sports</b> <i>Competition and training, or entry-level “come and try” days overseen by a state sporting association or equivalent governing body (e.g., AFL Victoria and AusKick; Cricket Victoria and Cricket Blast)</i>	Yes	Persons 18 years and under are <b>not required</b> to show proof of vaccination to organisers when participating in community sport on school premises.  Note community sports organisations are <b>not mandated</b> to collect proof of vaccination of staff, participants, or spectators. Please note some community sport organisations may have separate vaccination policies that will apply.	Not required.
	No	Schools will need to request vaccination information of community sport staff or workers.	<b>Schools are not required</b> to sight or collect individual vaccination information (such as COVID-19 digital certificates); the organisation providing a list of

		<b>Persons under 18 years are not required</b> to show proof of vaccination to organisers when participating in community sport on school premises.	names with vaccination status is sufficient.
			<b>Community sports organisations</b> are <b>required</b> to sight and/or collect individual vaccination information of their staff and spectators.
<b>Other community groups</b>	N/A	Schools will need to request evidence of vaccination of external staff or workers.  Community groups will need to request vaccination information relevant to their sector.	<b>Schools</b> are <b>not required</b> to sight or collect individual vaccination information (such as COVID-19 digital certificates); the organisation providing a list of names with vaccination status is sufficient.  <b>Community groups</b> are <b>required</b> to sight and/or collect vaccination information relevant to their sector.

## 16. School boarding premises and Medium-Term Residential Programs (MTRP)

Refer to [Advice for schools in managing the risk of covid-19 transmission in school boarding premises and medium term residential programs](#) for information about boarding schools.

## 17. Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) programs

Outside School Hours Care programs can operate. While OSHC programs can operate for students from multiple schools, it is recommended that mixing between students from different schools is minimised where practical.

### Managing COVID-19 cases at OSHC programs

Schools and OSHC providers will need to communicate closely regarding the status of identified confirmed case or close contacts.

The school must inform the OSHC provider when there has been a positive or probable person at the school. The OSHC provider is to advise staff and students to monitor for symptoms.

Refer to section, *Management of an unwell student or staff member at school*.

## 18. Students, staff and families arriving from overseas

There are additional requirements in place for students and families who arrive from overseas (both returning local students and international students).

Refer to [Victorian Border Crossing Order 2022 \(No. 3\)](#) for current requirements.

If the individual is over the age of 18 and has a medical exemption from vaccination, they must not attend a Victorian school or boarding school for 14 days following arrival from overseas.

## 2 Keeping COVIDSafe at school

## 19. Understanding COVID-19

For information on the science behind COVID-19 see [Facts about coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

A combination of strategies is required to minimise transmission risk. No single strategy completely reduces risk and not every measure will be possible in all educational settings. Where some controls are not feasible, others should be enhanced. Strategies should also be adjusted over time in line with the changing risk of transmission in the community.

## 20. Communicating and consulting with staff about health and safety

At the beginning of Term 1, principals are encouraged to spend time during a staff meeting discussing the health and safety measures that are in place. Principals should remind staff of the eLearn module School Infection Prevention and Control During COVID-19, which is available on LearnED, and encourage staff to refresh their knowledge. Principals should share a copy of the school's COVIDSafe Plan with all staff at the beginning of Term 1.

Principals must consult their local Health and Safety Representative(s) and Health and Safety Committee(s) (if applicable) to implement the health and safety guidance to the extent reasonably practicable and escalate unresolved issues via EduSafe. The Department is monitoring EduSafe to provide support. A [draft agenda](#) has been developed for Health and Safety Committee (HSC) meetings to assist in facilitating consultation and identifying and managing risks.

Principals can also promote the services outlined in the [COVID-19 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Support for Schools](#) page.

[Local Regional OHS Support Officers](#) can be contacted for assistance with local consultation if required.

## 21. Mental health and wellbeing

The mental health and wellbeing of principals, teachers, school staff and students is a priority.

### For students

Schools are encouraged to:

- Actively use the [Students at Risk Planning Tool](#) and the [Student check-in resource](#) to identify students who may be vulnerable and require support to maintain engagement and connection.
- Use Edusafe Plus to escalate incidents and risks so that Area support can be provided.
- The [Mental Health Toolkit](#) has advice and resources to support student mental health and wellbeing. This includes advice on positive mental health promotion, curriculum support, how to identify and access support as well as parent and student-specific pages.
- The [Advice for teachers – supporting student's mental health and wellbeing resource and the Quick Guide to Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Resources](#) highlights the most relevant evidence-based resources for teachers, parents and students.

### For staff

The Department has services available to support staff mental health and wellbeing.

More information and the full list of supports and services can be found on the [COVID-19 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Support for Schools](#) page, and the [Safety Management Plan for COVID-19](#)

[\(COVIDSafe Plan\)](#) includes guidance on which supports might be appropriate to respond to particular circumstances or risks.

Specific examples include:

- for principal class employees (including assistant principals): [Proactive Wellbeing Support service](#), the [Early Intervention Program](#) for more intensive support, and all other [Principal Health and Wellbeing services](#)
- for all staff: personalised over-the-phone and video counselling through the [Employee Assistance Program](#).
- for all staff and all people managers: through the [Staying Safe and Well Webinars](#).

## 22. Staff and student vaccinations

As part of the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out, all school staff and all students aged 5 and over are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

Information about vaccines and eligibility can be found on the [coronavirus.vic.gov.au](https://coronavirus.vic.gov.au) website.

### Required vaccinations for school staff

The Victorian Minister for Health has determined that COVID-19 vaccination is mandatory for staff who work in schools. This includes principals, teachers, administration and education support staff, including casual relief teachers (CRTs), pre-service teachers, and Outside School Hours Care staff.

All staff are required to have received three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine unless a medical exemption applies. Staff must receive a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by 25 February if they are already eligible, or within 3 months and 2 weeks of receiving a second dose to continue working in education settings. Staff are required to show evidence of their vaccination status.

Government school staff can upload their vaccination information onto EduPay, including a record of their third dose.

A staff member who does not meet the vaccination requirements will not be assigned alternative duties in place of onsite duties.

There is information about vaccination requirements for other adults attending school sites available in [COVID-19 vaccinations – visitors and volunteers working on school sites](#).

Vaccination is not mandatory for students, but vaccinations are strongly encouraged as the best way to protect individuals, families and school communities from further outbreaks and the spread of COVID-19.

Schools must treat healthcare information, including an individual's vaccination status or diagnosed medical condition (such as COVID-19) in accordance with the [Schools' Privacy Policy](#).

An individual's COVID diagnosis or vaccination status is not to be shared or discussed unless the individual (or their parent/carer) provides consent, or unless schools are legally obliged or authorised to do so (for example, when requested by the Department of Health).

Further guidance on the handling of health care information can be found on PAL under [Privacy and information sharing – Health care information](#). However, schools are required to inform all staff when there has been a COVID-19 case at their school. See: [Management of an unwell student or staff member at school](#).

### Flexible work arrangements to attend appointments

Staff can seek principal approval for flexible work arrangements to attend vaccination appointments for third doses. Staff do not have to formally take leave to attend vaccination

appointments; instead, principals/managers should agree the employee can take the time off without loss of pay. Staff can [access up to half a day's paid release from duty](#) to attend COVID-19 vaccine appointments for third dose vaccination. Principals should put arrangements in place that maximise the opportunity for all employees to attend vaccination appointments. Schools should be flexible in enabling staff to access vaccination appointments.

Staff who have used other leave entitlements or who have taken unpaid leave to attend a vaccination appointment should be recredited their leave entitlement or paid, consistent with the entitlement to access up to half a day's paid release from duty.

If an employee becomes unwell following a COVID-19 vaccination, they may access personal leave.

For further information about how staff will be supported to receive a COVID-19 vaccination, contact the Schools People Services general HR phone line: [1800 641 943](tel:1800641943).

## 23. Ventilation

For information about maximising ventilation in schools, including the appropriate use and placement of air purifiers, please see the [Department's Ventilation and Air Purification policy](#) and the [How to use an air purifier fact sheet](#).

Schools are encouraged to use the [Promoting airflow poster](#) in classrooms.

For further assistance, contact the Victorian School Building Authority on 1800 896 950 or email [airpurifiers@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:airpurifiers@education.vic.gov.au)

## 24. Vital COVIDSafe Steps

### Non-classroom based activities

Schools can run extra-curricular and other out-of-classroom activities including camps, excursions, sport and tours.

However, in planning for all non-classroom based activities (such as school assemblies) and extra-curricular activities, including camps, excursions, other out-of-school activities, incursions and learning activities such as sport, music and the arts during the first four weeks of term, schools must give consideration to whether the activity can be delayed or restructured (for example, completed in smaller groups or conducted outside to ensure it can be completed in a COVIDSafe manner).

Schools must conduct a risk assessment and determine the additional risk mitigation measures required. These may include:

- Limiting activity to the smallest possible cohort size (e.g. a single class group)
- Limiting activity to outdoor spaces
- Holding the activity as infrequently as possible
- Consider the non-participation of persons (staff or students) at higher risk of progression to severe disease (e.g. who are immunocompromised or have significant coexisting medical conditions)
- Staggering of groups who participate in the activity
- Activity being undertaken in larger rooms with strict physical distancing

For camps and excursions, schools should consider current levels of COVID-related absences in their school communities and staffing pressures that may be associated with the conduct of the activity. Prior to a student attending a camp or overnight stay, parents/carers must be informed about the COVIDSafe measures that will be in place during the camp or activity and must provide

permission for their child to attend, including where permission may already have been provided through a form submitted last year. In addition, parents/carers must be informed that if a confirmed or probable case was present at the camp while infectious, that children may be identified as household-like contacts and be required to quarantine for 7 days.

### **Staff meetings and professional development**

Staff meetings and professional development activities should be held remotely for the first 4 weeks of term one wherever feasible. Staff who are attending school under critical workforce exemptions should not attend face-to-face staff meetings or professional development activities.

### **Maintain physical distancing**

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

Staff must practise physical distancing 1.5m 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.

Staff should reduce the use of common areas such as staff rooms. Staff should eat and drink outside wherever possible.

Students should practise physical distancing where possible. Maintaining a physical distance of 1.5 metres 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 used to reduce risk.

Strategies to support physical distancing include:

- rostering access to shared spaces, limiting time in these spaces and promoting breaks outdoors
- the careful management of movement of adults through all common areas, including 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
- 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, using floor markings where appropriate.
- marking the floor to indicate physical distancing in appropriate locations (e.g., canteens, staff rooms and reception areas)
- actions to reduce the congregation of adults around the school and reduce congestion. Schools can do this by using multiple entry/exit points and appropriate signage to communicate expected behaviours.
- communicate the strategies to parents with posters and communications to school communities to remind staff, students and families of the need for physical distancing. Posters and a parent letter are available in the [communications support pack](#).

### **Minimise mixing between classes and year levels**

Schools should seek to minimise mixing between classes and year levels, wherever possible. Schools should consider rostering the use of both staff and student spaces to facilitate this.

## Use of large spaces (such as halls)

Consider opportunities to adapt indoor activities outdoors, for example holding classes outside. Where possible, staff should rest, eat and meet in outdoor areas only.

Use posters 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](#) and support staff and students to use a combination of sun protection measures when UV levels are 3 or above.

## Staggered start and finish times and breaks

Consider staggered drop-off and pick-up times (noting these should not change standard school hours).

Use multiple entry and exit points to prevent bottlenecks of students and minimise parents onsite.

## 25. Face masks

Please visit [coronavirus.vic.gov.au](https://coronavirus.vic.gov.au) for the latest face mask requirements.

For all school settings:

- School staff will be required to always wear masks indoors when not actively teaching or communicating with students. Masks are not compulsory for teachers and staff outdoors.
- Students in Grade 3 and above must wear a face mask indoors at school, including specialist schools), and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) programs, unless a lawful exception applies. Students must wear face masks even if vaccinated. Students are not required to wear masks outside.
- For composite classes that include students in and above Grade 3 and below Grade 3, those below Grade 3 are strongly encouraged to wear masks.
- When attending outdoor school camps and excursions, face masks are not mandatory, unless physical distancing cannot be maintained. Face masks must continue to be worn when indoors on camps and excursions.
- Everyone over 8 years old must wear a face mask when travelling to and from school on public transport, taxis or ride share vehicles.
- Visitors to schools aged 8 and above must wear a face mask in all indoor spaces, unless a lawful exception applies.
- Students in Prep to Grade 2 are strongly recommended to wear a face mask indoors at school or an OSHC program.

A face mask must cover the nose and mouth. Face shields, scarves or bandanas do not meet these requirements.

There are [lawful reasons for not wearing a face mask](#), including for staff and students who are unable to wear a face mask due to the nature of their disability, medical or a mental health condition. Parent/carers of a student/s who meet the criteria for an exception should provide their approval in writing for their child/ren to not wear a mask to the school.

There is no requirement for a letter for a medical exception for not wearing a face mask from a medical practitioner.

Outside of lawful exceptions, schools should treat any deliberate and persistent non-compliance with the face masks direction as a serious matter. Usual school procedures for dealing with non-

compliance with school rules should be followed, in the same way that school uniform enforcement is dealt with.

Additional advice and support are available from Community Liaison Officers and Senior Education Improvement Leaders.

### **PPE and face mask supplies in schools**

- Encourage students, staff and contractors/visitors to bring their own face mask and provide enough single-use face masks for staff, students or visitors who do not have their own or for masks that get damaged/soiled or require replacement.
- Schools will be supplied with an initial stock of N95 masks, surgical masks for staff and students in secondary schools and child-size surgical masks for students in primary schools to ensure that all staff and students have access to a range of appropriate mask options.
- Schools should continue to audit PPE supplies to ensure adequate supplies remain available in the event of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, including appropriately sized masks for younger children.
- Schools can buy PPE items through the COS platform using the following codes:
  - Surgical masks (SAFE2103, SAFE4053, SAFE4054, SAFE4056) and
  - N95 masks (SAFE4052, SAFE4053, SAFE4054)
- Alternatively, schools can buy PPE items from their own suppliers of PPE, such as pharmacies.
- For more information, contact the Schools Procurement Branch by email: [schools.procurement@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:schools.procurement@education.vic.gov.au)

### **More information**

- Schools must display information and signage at school entrances and in communal areas such as staff rooms encouraging staff and students to wear masks wherever they are required. Posters are available in the [communications support pack](#).
- School staff should refer to the Department [guidance for the use of personal protective equipment \(PPE\) in education](#) to determine when additional PPE is required and for information on the correct and safe use of PPE.

## **26. Infection prevention and control**

### **Practise good hygiene**

All staff, students and visitors to schools should practise good 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 where required.

Hand sanitiser should be available at entry points to classrooms. Schools should provide age-appropriate education and reminders about hand hygiene. If soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitiser that contains at least 60 per cent alcohol should be made accessible.

Sharing of food is not permitted.

Use non-contact greetings (not shaking hands).

Ensure the highest hygiene practices amongst food handlers, as per the Department's [Safe Food Handling Guidance](#).

## Safety information and training

Any new staff or department staff working onsite in schools who did not complete the eLearn module School Infection Prevention and Control During COVID-19 in Term 4, 2020, must complete the module as soon as possible. Staff may complete the training again as a refresher, at any time.

The module is available on LearnED via [EduPay login](#) and takes about 20 minutes to complete. A parallel module is [available on FUSE](#) for preservice teachers, casual relief teachers and other staff working in schools who do not have eduPay access.

## School Cleaning Arrangements

The cleaning arrangements for all Victorian government schools will return to the business-as-usual cleaning scope for Term 1 2022.

### Cleaning following a confirmed COVID-19 case

If there is an outbreak of COVID-19 from the beginning of Term 1 2022, the Department of Health or a Local Public Health Unit will advise schools if additional cleaning is required, based on risk assessment as part of an outbreak management plan.

This clean is arranged and paid for by the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) and this applies to all Victorian Government schools, both metropolitan and regional.

Once advised of the need for cleaning to occur, the VSBA will contact the principal as soon as possible to make arrangements. The cleaning is conducted in accordance with guidelines that have been developed with the Department of Health.

## 27. Contacts

- **DET COVID-19 hotline:** DET's dedicated COVID-19 phone advice line Mon-Fri (8:30am-5:00pm) and Sat-Sun (10.00am-3.00pm) on **1800 338 663** can address or appropriately refer calls on all matters.
- **Staff health and safety:** Further advice and support in phone 1300 074 715 or email [safety@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:safety@education.vic.gov.au)
- **Finance:** School Financial Management Support Unit: [schools.finance.support@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:schools.finance.support@education.vic.gov.au) or (03) 7022 2222
- **Cleaning:** For cleaning information or advice, please contact [cleaning@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:cleaning@education.vic.gov.au)
- **OSHC and other early childhood:** DETs dedicated COVID-19 phone advice line during business hours on 1800 338 663
- **Student transport:** [student.transport@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:student.transport@education.vic.gov.au) or 7022 2247
- **SEILs:** Schools should contact their SEIL to discuss any queries. Local consultation should continue with staff, Health and Safety Representatives and OHS Committees (if applicable). For further advice and support in phone 1300 074 715 or email [safety@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:safety@education.vic.gov.au)
- **Media unit:** Call (03) 8688 7776 for support with media matters

**Note:** all Victorian government schools are required to follow the School Operations Guide and refer to the Department's Policy and Advisory Library (PAL) policies for anything not specifically covered in the School Operations Guide which provides COVID-specific school operational information.

For example, it is important for schools to continue to follow all Department policies in PAL in relation to OHS, anaphylaxis management, child safety and duty of care.