

Operations Guide

Victorian government schools

From **8 March 2022**



Education
and Training

OFFICIAL: Sensitive

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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.

COVIDSafe measures for schools


Education and Training

What's new:



Free rapid antigen testing

- more than 39 million rapid antigen tests to be delivered to schools and early childhood education and care settings
- twice-weekly voluntary testing at home
 - primary school students and staff
 - secondary school students and staff
- five-times-weekly voluntary testing at home
 - specialist school students and staff

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

- up to an additional 60,000 air purifiers will be distributed to schools ahead of winter



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: 15 February 2022

22-017

2. Rapid antigen testing

Free rapid antigen tests will be made available for all staff and students in Victorian schools throughout 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 use throughout Term 1 2022. Schools should inform parents/carers and staff as soon as tests are available for collection.

Tests are provided in packs of 5 individual tests. Parents/carers should be provided with one pack for each child for use for the fortnight, or two packs for each child in a specialist school. Test kits will be delivered to the school periodically throughout the term. 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.

Staff, Casual Relief Teachers (CRT), casual ES staff, pre-service teachers and ad hoc school council employed CRT who are working regularly in a school (e.g., two or three times a week) should be provided with one pack of rapid antigen tests per two weeks.

Other non-school employed staff (e.g. regular on-site contractors such as cleaners, construction workers) are not accommodated in each school's test kit allocation. They may however be provided with tests if the school has sufficient kits available.

If staff work at multiple sites, schools should ask the staff member if they have already received a pack.

Students and staff should continue to conduct the tests at home and must report any positive test results to their school and the Department of Health. In Primary and Secondary schools, tests should be conducted twice weekly, on days that suit families – no particular days are prescribed, but it is suggested school encourage common days for tests to be done at home such as Monday and Wednesday, or Tuesday and Thursday, to enable common reminders to be given to students by teachers at the end of each preceding day. Specialist school students and staff should test every school day.

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 COVID Test [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.

Students and staff who have tested positive for COVID-19, have completed their 7-day isolation period and are subsequently asymptomatic do not need to undertake screening for 30 days.

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

If a CRT tests positive to COVID-19, the CRT should notify the school, their employer (where it is not the school), and the Department of Health.

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](#).

Test availability and storage

Upon receipt of the test packs, schools should make test packs available for families to collect at the earliest opportunity.

Rapid antigen test packs that are held overnight should be stored as securely as possible.

Schools should not break up test packs when they do not have enough of them. It is important that families and staff get the entire pack as it contains the detailed instructions on how to use them plus the components for their use.

Schools can review their individual test allocation and track delivery through the [test dispatch data portal for schools](#) (login required). This data is updated on a daily basis.

For questions regarding the delivery or supply of rapid antigen tests for your school, please contact the [Procurement Team](#).

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. Follow guidance for [Management of Students Displaying COVID-19 Symptoms in Education Settings](#).
2. Let the person know they need to follow guidelines in the [Testing Requirements for Contacts and Exposed Persons](#). If applicable the affected person/s should follow the COVID-19 RAT procedure, which recommends a symptomatic person in a workplace takes a COVID-19 test.
3. 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 Student COVID-19 [COVID 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 must complete the [Schools COVID Case](#)

[Management 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 the [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 staff and 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 should be provided to all staff who attended the school during the period of attendance. For parents/carers and students, the notification can be provided to only the affected group/cohort/year level or to and can be provided the whole school.
7. The Department has launched 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.
8. Ensure that staff or students refrain from returning to school if they remain symptomatic, unless it is known that their symptoms are **ongoing, or** caused by an underlying health condition or medication. **Refer to any student health management plan on file.**

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](#) in circumstances where that evidence is not available. For further advice please refer to [Frequently Asked Questions - Teaching Service](#).

Table 2: Summary of student and staff scenarios

Scenario	Required actions for the staff member or 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 do not attend school 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 Checklist for COVID cases.</p>	<p>The school must notify DET of positive student cases via the Vic Ed COVID Tool.</p> <p>Staff members must report a positive test result and submit a leave request via eduPay on the first day of leave See COVID-19 Leave Management Guidance for details.</p> <p>The school should notify the 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 Checklist for COVID contacts.</p> <p>Students must quarantine for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and must not attend school during this period.</p> <p>Staff members must quarantine for 7 days</p>	<p>No further action.</p>

Scenario	Required actions for the staff member or student/family	Required actions for the school
<p>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.</p>	<p>(inclusive of weekends) and must not attend school during this period unless a critical work exemption has been agreed (see Page 9, <i>Exemptions for staff who are household contacts</i>).</p>	
<p>A student or staff member has been in contact with a case of COVID-19, including at school or at work.</p>	<p>If asymptomatic, students and staff should continue to attend school and monitor for symptoms.</p> <p>If symptomatic, 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, 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 Checklist for COVID contacts.</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>
<p>Staff/student has contracted COVID-19, completed their 7-day isolation period and is asymptomatic.</p>	<p>Staff/ students can safely return to school. They do not need to be tested if they have been re-exposed within 30 days of ending their self-isolation.</p>	<p>The school should confirm that the staff/student has completed their 7-day isolation period</p>
<p>Staff/student has completed their quarantine period as a household contact and has returned a negative test result.</p> <p>However, during the quarantine period an additional member of the</p>	<p>Student/staff household contacts should quarantine for 7 days from the date of the first positive test of the household index case.</p> <p>Household contacts are not subject to rolling quarantine periods. If the index case remains in the household, or if subsequent cases are identified within the</p>	<p>No further action</p>

Scenario	Required actions for the staff member or student/family	Required actions for the school
household has returned a positive result.	<p>household, the quarantine end date for the close contact is unchanged.</p> <p>Staff/ students can safely return to school and do not require negative test documentation.</p> <p><i>Please note, if the staff or student becomes symptomatic, they should get tested and not attend school.</i></p>	
Staff/student with a positive RAT (probable case) who receives a negative PCR test within 48 hours after the positive RAT	<p>Staff/student can end their period of self-isolation period. They can safely return to school.</p> <p>Recommend that they notify school of negative PCR test result.</p> <p>If staff/students are too unwell to attend school, usual leave/absence policies apply.</p>	<p>The school should notify DET of the change in status of a student via the Vic Ed COVID Tool.</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 Section 12: *Staff and student vaccinations*.

8. Managing staff absences

Schools should apply the following steps to manage staff absences. Each step should only be used if all options in the previous step have been exhausted.

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 'Support Your School' initiative applicants via the Job Opportunity Pool on [Recruitment Online](#). The 'Job Opportunity Pool' will have individuals who can be deployed on a casual basis to assist with daily school operations, including face-to-face teaching, classroom and student support (including allied health), or administrative assistance.' For further recruitment guidance, please refer to the help guide [here](#).
- 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. You must inform the region if a staff member returns to your school under the critical worker exemption criteria by emailing your [Regional Office's COVID-19 team](#).

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. The Department has prepared daily and weekly [Remote Learning Packs](#) for Levels Foundation-6 that may support schools to transition to remote and flexible learning.

Exemptions for staff who are household contacts

School staff, referred to by the Department of Health as education workers, are eligible for an exemption from household contact home isolation requirements to allow them to attend their workplace (school) to support the delivery of essential services.

Under the conditions of the exemption, education workers 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 employed or contracted directly by the school who are working in this category. Rapid antigen tests for this purpose will be supplied as an increase to the school's regular fortnightly delivery, from week five of Term 1 onwards. Other education workers should seek advice directly from their employer on exemption and supports.

Schools seeking financial advice in relation to the engagement of additional support to manage workforce shortages should contact the Financial Services Division on schools.finance.support@education.vic.gov.au

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.

Student attendance must be recorded twice daily.

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. The Department has prepared [online learning activities](#) that may be useful in instances where families or schools are seeking additional activities and support for individual students' learning while isolating.

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. 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. Students are not required to be vaccinated to attend school.

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 who were fully vaccinated on or before 25 October 2021 must have a booking to receive their third dose on or before 25 March 2022, if they have not had their third dose by 25 February 2022.
- Staff who are not yet eligible for their third dose will be required to receive a third dose within three months and two weeks of receiving their second dose.
- Staff required to be vaccinated, but unable to receive their third dose by the nominated deadline because they were quarantining as a close contact, have an additional 14 days from the end of their quarantine period to receive their third dose and may continue working during this period provided they have a booking for a third dose.
- Staff required to be vaccinated, but unable to receive their third dose by the nominated deadline because they were recovering from a recent COVID-19 infection, have an additional four months from the end of their isolation period to receive their third dose. Staff should note that following the expiry of their temporary medical exemption, they will have a maximum of two weeks to receive their third dose. Staff should report their COVID-19 infection on eduPay.
- Staff are required to log onto eduPay to record vaccination status or to enter the date of their booking.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advises that a previous COVID-19 infection is not a contraindication to COVID-19 vaccination, that vaccination can occur after a COVID-19 infection and there is no requirement to delay vaccination after recovery from acute illness.

Government school staff can upload their vaccination information onto EduPay, including a record of their third dose. Employees who do not update their third dose status on eduPay by the appropriate deadline will not be able to work at a school site.

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 school staff available in [COVID-19 vaccinations - teaching service and school council employees](#).

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](#)

COVIDSafe requirements for visitors and volunteers performing work

The third dose vaccination requirements, with the dates set out above, also apply to any visitor or volunteer performing work on school sites. This includes:

- a person contracted to work at an education facility and who will or may be in close proximity to children, students or staff, whether or not engaged by the education operator including casual relief teachers, NDIS providers and auditors (but does not include delivery personnel).
- Department staff who attend an education facility (such as allied health personnel)
- staff of any other entity who attends an education facility
- volunteers that attend an education facility and that work in close proximity to children, students or staff (including parent helpers)
- students on placements at an education facility.

Schools must advise visitors and volunteers they must adhere to COVIDSafe requirements – including vaccination, 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 visitors to schools (not performing work)

Service Victoria QR code check-in is not required at schools. Routine school visitor record keeping arrangements will continue to apply.

In Victorian government schools, parents, carers and other adult visitors (excluding students who visit a school to complete a secondary school subject) who enter school buildings must be able to show evidence of two doses of COVID-19 vaccine or have a valid medical exception.

The following limited exceptions also apply:

- when attending to administer medical treatment to their own child when the treatment cannot be administered by the school
- when attending to collect their child who is unwell and cannot leave the school building unaccompanied by their parent/carer

- when attending for a momentary period that does not involve any sustained contact with staff or students, for example, to collect a completed art project, collecting a packet of rapid antigen test or similar.

Proof of vaccination can be checked by a COVID-19 digital certificate (Service Victoria app or smartphone wallet) or printed copy of a digital certificate or immunisation history statement.

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.

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
Community sports <i>Competition and training, or entry-level “come and try” days</i>	Yes	Persons 18 years and under are not required to show proof of vaccination to organisers when participating in community sport on school premises.	Not required.

<i>overseen by a state sporting association or equivalent governing body (e.g., AFL Victoria and AusKick; Cricket Victoria and Cricket Blast)</i>		Note community sports organisations are not mandated to collect proof of vaccination of staff, participants, or spectators. Please note some community sport organisations may have separate vaccination policies that will apply.	
	No	<p>Schools will need to request vaccination information of community sport staff or workers.</p> <p>Persons under 18 years are not required to show proof of vaccination to organisers when participating in community sport on school premises.</p>	<p>Schools are not required 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.</p> <p>Community sports organisations are required to sight and/or collect individual vaccination information of their staff and spectators.</p>
<p>Other community groups</p> <p><i>Includes after-hours community language schools</i></p>	N/A	<p>Schools will need to request evidence of vaccination of external staff or workers.</p> <p>Community groups will need to request vaccination information relevant to their sector.</p>	<p>Schools are not required 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.</p> <p>Community groups are required to sight and/or collect vaccination information relevant to their sector.</p>

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 [Information for overseas travellers | Coronavirus Victoria](#) for current requirements.

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. 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](#).

21. 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](#).

22. Vital COVIDSafe Steps

Non-classroom-based activities

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

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 (including swimming), music and the arts, schools must conduct a risk assessment to consider the following:

- Limiting activity to the smallest possible cohort size (e.g. a single class group, or single school; or smallest possible group or number of schools for interschool activity)
- Limiting activity to outdoor spaces
- Holding the activity as infrequently as possible
- Delaying and rescheduling the event
- Considering 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
- Holding the activity 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.

Where a school decides to postpone a camp, a plan to ensure the camp takes place at a later date should be provided to the relevant SEIL.

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.

Parents/carers must be informed that if a confirmed or probable case is present at the camp while infectious, others attending the camp may be identified as household-like contacts and be required to quarantine for 7 days. This will depend on the sleeping, living and dining arrangements in place at particular campsites.

Secondary school students are strongly encouraged to conduct rapid antigen testing at camps consistent with the twice-a-week schedule for mainstream schools and each school day for specialist schools. Secondary school students should test at home on the morning of the camp and then, if the camp is longer than three days, only once on the morning of day four.

Primary school children should test at home on the morning of the camp. Where a primary school is planning a camp of more than three days duration, advice on the conduct of rapid antigen testing should be sought through the DET COVID-19 Hotline on 1800 338 663.

For further guidance on school camps, refer to the following documents: [Requirements for operation of school camps](#) and [RAT Guidance for staff on school camps](#).

Staff meetings and professional development

Staff meetings and professional development activities can be held face-to-face or remotely. Standard COVIDSafe measures apply, including; mask wearing (in primary school settings), physical distancing, limiting duration of the activity, and optimising ventilation. Critical staff health and wellbeing training such as first aid, anaphylaxis and infection prevention control training, should continue. 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.

Outdoor activities

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.

Interschool activities

Interschool activities including staff and students from different schools are permitted. Schools and event organisers should still apply a risk assessment and required risk mitigation measures.

School events

School community events are permitted. Schools and event organisers should still apply a risk assessment and implement required risk mitigation measures.

23. Face masks

Please visit coronavirus.vic.gov.au for the latest face mask requirements.

For all school settings:

- Facemasks remain strongly recommended but are not required in secondary schools.
- Primary school staff will be required to always wear masks indoors.
- There is an exemption from this requirement if primary school staff are actively teaching and clear enunciation or visibility of their mouth is essential.
- Masks are not compulsory for teachers and staff outdoors, however they are strongly recommended if physical distance cannot be maintained, even outdoors.
- Students in Grade 3 to Grade 6 must wear a face mask indoors, including age-equivalent children in specialist schools and Grades 3 to 6 students in settings such as P-9 or P-12 schools, and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) programs, unless a lawful exception applies. Grades 3 to 6 students must wear face masks even if vaccinated. Grade 3 to 6 students are not required to wear masks outside, however they are strongly recommended if physical distance cannot be maintained or when students are not undertaking physical exercise (for example; masks are strongly recommended when classes are held outside). Staff in schools with both primary and secondary aged students must don face masks indoors when working in the primary education settings. 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 aged 8 and above to schools that include Grades 3 to 6 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 be well fitted and 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 suitable for adults and older children; 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](#).

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 Department guidance on [management of students displaying COVID-19 symptoms in education Settings](#) and [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.

24. Communicating and consulting with staff about health and safety

Principals are encouraged to continue to spend time during staff meetings ensuring all staff are fully aware of 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 make sure all staff have access to a copy of the school's COVIDSafe Plan.

To support principals to have conversations with their staff, a [template presentation](#) is available to facilitate discussion around the COVIDSafe measures in place. Principals can amend it to suit local decisions that they have made about implementing COVIDSafe measures.

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.

25. 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 **on the advice of the Department of Health.**

Cleaning following a confirmed COVID-19 case

The Department of Health (DH) does not consider deep cleaning as the primary or immediate infection prevention and control measure following a confirmed case or outbreak in schools.

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.

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.