School Operations Guide

Term 1, from Monday 31 January

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Revised operational advice for schools

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.

Rapid antigen testing

Free rapid antigen tests will be made available for all staff and students in Victorian schools for the first four 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

Rapid antigen test kits will be distributed 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 five 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 three. 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 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.

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.

Your diocesan education office's OHS staff 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.

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.*

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, education contact tracing will no longer be a requirement.

The revised process is set out below.

Principal actions: identification and notification

1. Parents/carers should complete the [RA Test portal](#) if a <u>student</u> 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](#).

2. <u>Students</u> who report a positive result must isolate for seven days and not attend school during that period.

3. Where a <u>student</u> 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. <u>Staff</u> must report the result of a positive test and request leave. Staff who report a positive result must isolate for seven days and not attend school during that period.

5. Where a <u>staff</u> 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 activities

   The notification can be provided to only the affected group/cohort/year level or to the whole school.

7. Ensure that <u>staff</u> or <u>students</u> 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. New self-serve templates for principals to use in the event of a positive case associated with the school will soon be available. Each template package will contain a message to parents/carers, a message to staff, and website/social media wording. Templates will be provided in a future COVID-19 Update from your diocesan education office.

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 your 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).

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 existing leave policy. Schools may seek advice from the employee relations team in their diocesan education office where further clarification is required.

Table 2: Summary of student and staff scenarios

Scenario	Required actions for the student/family	Required actions for the school
A student or staff member tests positive to COVID-19, either through RA test or PCR test	Isolate at home or in private accommodation for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and **do not attend school** during this period. Inform the school, that they have tested positive to COVID-19. A negative test is not required to return to school following completion of 7 days of isolation. Follow the Checklist for COVID cases.	The school must report positive student cases via the VicEd COVID Tool. Staff members must report a positive test result and submit a leave request. The school should notify school community that there has been a case at the school using the communication templates available.
A student or staff member is a household contact or house-like contact*.	Notify the school that they are a household or household-like contact.	No further action.

You have spent more than four hours with someone who has COVID-19 inside a house, accommodation, or care facility. *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.*	Follow the [Checklist for COVID contacts.](#) **Students** must quarantine for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and **must not attend school** during this period. **Staff members** must quarantine for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and **must not attend school** during this period unless a **critical work exemption** has been agreed (see Page 9, *Exemptions for staff who are household contacts*).	
A student or staff member has been in contact with a case of COVID-19, including at school or at work.	If **asymptomatic,** students and staff should continue to attend school and monitor for symptoms. 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. On receipt of a negative test result, and if well enough, the student/staff member can return to school. If staff/students are too unwell to attend school, usual leave/absence policies apply. Follow the [Checklist for COVID contacts.](#)	No further action. The school is not required to seek rapid antigen test results from the students or staff unless a positive test is returned.

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, school staff who are household contacts will 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 to their school 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

- 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.

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 Catholic Education Multi-Enterprise Agreement 2018 (VCEMEA 2018).

Teachers and support staff will be expected to work on site, except for medically vulnerable staff and staff required to quarantine.

All teachers and support staff who perform work at Victorian Catholic schools are required to comply with the vaccination directions outlined in the COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination (Specified Facilities) Order (No. 2) and as amended.

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

Staff who may be medically vulnerable

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.

Staff who are medically vulnerable should seek advice from their medical practitioner in relation to their onsite attendance. Where the employee is unable to work either on site or remotely, they can access personal leave by providing a medical certificate.

Similarly, staff who are living with or caring for elderly or chronically ill relatives should seek advice from the medical practitioner of the person for whom they are caring to determine if they can attend on site or should work remotely. They should provide a medical certificate if they are seeking to access personal leave.

Employees at greater risk of serious illness should seek advice from their medical practitioner in relation to their onsite attendance. Where the employee is unable to work on site, they should provide a medical certificate if they are seeking to work remotely for this purpose or to access personal leave. These arrangements should be reviewed regularly during the term.

For employees who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 but their medical practitioner's advice is that they remain unable to work on site, continued provision of remote work will be available where:

- the employee provides a medical certificate setting out the recommendation from their medical practitioner

- the principal forms a view that it is reasonable, practicable and appropriate for the employee to work remotely.

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.

Students who may be medically vulnerable

As per the advice of the Victorian Chief Health Officer, COVIDSafe measures have been put in place ensure that schools are as safe as possible for all children including those with medical vulnerabilities, however independent medical advice should always be taken on an individual basis.

An individual assessment is always recommended and decisions regarding school attendance should be informed by the nature of a child or young person's condition, its severity and intensity of required treatment. In most cases, the presence of common conditions of childhood, such as asthma, epilepsy or Type 1 diabetes, should not preclude a student from attending face-to-face learning.

In keeping with expert public health advice, some students may be at higher risk for severe outcomes or complications of COVID-19, for example those with chronic medical conditions. Any student with a chronic medical condition should seek advice from their medical practitioner about attending school on-site at different stages in the COVID-19 pandemic. Given most of these conditions are rare in children, it should be an uncommon event for a

child to be determined by a medical practitioner to be unable to return to school due to an ongoing medical reason raising concerns about COVID-19, outside of an acute illness.

Assessments should be reviewed alongside notable changes to COVID-19 transmission in Victoria and where eligible students have received a COVID-19 vaccination.

Schools must ensure students with medical needs have an up-to-date health plans 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.

For additional information to support decision-making, see:

- [Asthma Australia](#)

- [Royal Children's Hospital – advice for respiratory patients](#)

- [JDRF – Coronavirus and children with T1 diabetes](#).

QR codes and visitors to schools

The use of QR code check-ins, verification of vaccination status and retention of relevant information apply at different times and to the following different types of attendees to your school:

- **Employees** – All persons employed by the school or by a diocesan education office including teachers, early childhood educators and educational support staff, etc.

- **Other workers** – Any non-employee performing work on site who will or may be in close proximity to children, students or staff. *This does not include delivery personnel*.

- **Visitors** – All persons attending the site who are not performing work and do not fit one of the above two categories.

If a person must provide verification of their vaccination status and they refuse or do not meet the vaccination/exemption requirements, that person should be asked to leave the site. This is a reasonable request and enables us to maintain our COVIDSafe processes, and safeguard the health and wellbeing of the school community. If the person does not leave or becomes aggressive, the school should contact its regional leadership or leadership consultant or diocesan education office staff. If the situation escalates, contact the police.

QR code check-in

The use of Service Victoria QR codes for electronic record keeping is now mandatory in all schools to enable the effective contact tracing of any COVID-19 cases.

Employees are not required to check in with a QR code.

Other workers are required to check in with a QR code.

Visitors are required to check in with a QR code when entering school buildings, but not school grounds.

Schools can permit parents to enter buildings on site for student pick-up and drop-off, providing sufficient QR code locations are available for parents to check in. Where this is not possible, parents should not be permitted to enter buildings for pick-up and drop-off.

Further information about QR code set-up can be found at [Register to use the Victorian Government QR code service](#).

QR code check-in required		
	On school grounds	**Within school buildings**
Employees	✗	✗
Other workers	✓	✓
Visitors	✗	✓

Verification of vaccination status and retention of relevant information

Other workers performing work on school sites (both inside and outdoors) must have had at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by 29 November 2021 or have a valid medical exemption. **Other workers** must also be advised to adhere to the COVIDSafe requirements set out in this Guide.

Under the COVID-19 Mandatory Vaccination (Specified Facilities) Directions, if a worker is, or may be, scheduled to work at a specified facility, the operator must collect, record and hold vaccination information about the worker. For the purposes of our schools, this means **employees** and **other workers**, although the information we collect, record and hold is different for those two categories.

Processes are already in place to record the vaccination status of **employees** in Personnel Record System (PRS) or eHR/My HR. Schools will have to implement a new process for recording vaccination status for **other workers** attending the site, such as contractors, volunteers and certain visitors.

Examples of **other workers** in an education context include:

- persons contracted to work at an educational facility, whether or not engaged by the education operator (i.e. casual relief teachers, IT personnel, NDIS providers, auditors, breakfast club suppliers)

- staff of diocesan education offices who attend an educational facility (e.g. allied health personnel)

- staff of any other entity who attend an educational facility

- volunteers who attend an educational facility and work in close proximity to children, students or staff (including parent helpers)

- students on placement at an educational facility.

Employees who are unvaccinated or have an unknown vaccination status are not allowed to attend on site.

Retention of information

Schools are to create a Vaccination Information Register for **other workers**. Unlike for employees, *schools do not need to keep copies of the vaccination/exemption certificate for other workers*, but will need to keep a record of the pertinent information about the vaccination status.

The CECV has developed a Vaccination Information Register template for schools to adopt to assist in this requirement:

Template COVID-19 Vaccination Information Register
COVID Vaccination Information Register (Excel spreadsheet) (Word document)

Collecting health information

Under the requirement to collect, record and hold vaccination status information, schools must be conscious of handling medical information appropriately. Where school employers have collected COVID-19 vaccination certificates that contain healthcare identifiers (which are included on the Australian Immunisation Register COVID-19 vaccination certificate) for vaccination status confirmation, schools must:

- redact healthcare identifier information for storage purposes to reduce the risk that it will be inadvertently used or disclosed

- ensure that certificates are stored securely

- consider implementing or amending policies or procedures to prohibit the use and disclosure of healthcare identifier information contained in any certificate.

Required to verify vaccination status and retain relevant information	
Employees	✔️ In PRS or eHR/My HR
Other workers	✔️ In a local register
Visitors	❌

Verification of vaccination status (visual verification only)

All **visitors** attending schools, including for drop-off and pick-up, must adhere to physical distancing, density limit and face mask requirements, and practise respiratory etiquette and good hand hygiene.

In addition, **visitors** who enter school buildings must also have had at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by 29 November 2021 or have a valid medical exemption, with the following limited exceptions:

- 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 or similar.

Visitors attending any event or activity inside a school building including, but not limited to, tours, graduations, kindergarten transitions and whole-school events are required to show evidence of vaccination.

Meetings and other discussions (such as Student Support Group meetings) with **visitors** who do not meet vaccination requirements should be held virtually.

Visitors attending school sites for drop-off and pick-up who do not enter school buildings do not need to comply with vaccination requirements.

Any **visitor** who needs to access an early childhood education and care service (including OSHC) and is required to traverse the school building to access the service is required to check in, but does not need to show their vaccination status.

Sighting vaccination status

When visually verifying the vaccination status of a visitor, no information is required to be recorded or retained. It is recommended that this verification occurs at an easily controllable location, such as an entrance to the school grounds or an entrance to a school building.

QR code check-in required		
	On school grounds	**Within school buildings**
Employees	❌ Already in PRS or eHR/My HR	
Other workers	❌ Verified and recorded in Vaccination Information Register	
Visitors	✅	✅ Some exceptions apply (see above)

Summary of QR code check-in and vaccination/status information requirements

	QR code check-in required		Required to verify vaccination status and retain relevant information	Required to verify vaccination status (visual verification only)	
	On school grounds	**Within school buildings**		**On school grounds**	**Within school buildings**
Employees	✘	✘	✔ In PRS or eHR/My HR	✘ Already in PRS or eHR/My HR	
Other workers	✔	✔	✔ In a local register	✘ Already verified and recorded in Vaccination Information Register	
Visitors	✔	✔	✘	✔	✔

Note: There are some instances when a visitor **does not** need to verify their vaccination status:

- 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 or similar
- when traversing school buildings only to access early childhood education and care services (including OSHC).

Playgrounds and school facilities

Playgrounds

Playgrounds are open for school use and community use.

Use of school facilities by community and sports groups

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

When hiring out school facilities, schools are required to collect, record and hold vaccination information of all workers, and volunteers that work with children. To meet this requirement, schools do not need to directly sight proof of vaccination of these workers (e.g. digital certificate). Schools can request that the hiring person or group provide a list with the names and vaccination status of any workers.

If an external party is using school facilities during school hours, mixing between external parties and school staff and students should be minimised (for example, ideally a swim school would have **exclusive use** of a school pool and changeroom).

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 *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)*	Yes	Children aged 12 years 2 months and older are **not required** to show proof of vaccination to organisers when participating in community sport on school premises. 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.	Not required.
	No	Schools will need to request vaccination information of community sport staff or workers.	**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.
		Children aged 12 years 2 months and older are not required to show proof of vaccination to organisers when participating in community sport on school premises.	**Community sports organisations** are **required** to sight and/or collect individual vaccination information of their staff and spectators.
Other community groups	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.	**School**s 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.
			Community groups are **required** to sight and/or collect vaccination information relevant to their sector.

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.

School boarding premises and Medium Term Residential Programs

Schools should refer to the Department of Education and Training's Managing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in school boarding premises and Medium Term Residential Programs webpage for further information regarding attendance at boarding premises.

Outside School Hours Care programs

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) programs can operate for students eligible for onsite supervision across Victoria. Although 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.

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.

Keeping COVIDSafe at school

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.

Mental health and wellbeing

The mental health and wellbeing of principals, teachers, school staff and students remain an important consideration.

The diocesan education offices of the CECV continue to provide a full suite of services to support staff mental health and wellbeing. This includes services and resources aimed at addressing individual needs, as well as tools and supports to help guide staff through this time.

For students

Wellbeing check-ins – In addition to recording student attendance, schools **must** have processes and procedures to ensure that student wellbeing check-ins take place each day, on a group and/or individual basis.

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.

As part of the toolkit, the Department of Education and Training has partnered with Smiling Mind to produce [resources to support VCE and VCAL students](#) to remain positive and engaged in their education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional resources are available on the CEVN website:

- [Coronavirus (COVID-19) Wellbeing Resources](#)

- [Coronavirus (COVID-19) Family Engagement and Support](#)

- [Coronavirus (COVID-19) Supporting Learner Diversity](#).

Resources for principals and staff

In the Archdiocese of Melbourne, [principal wellbeing services](#) are available through Converge International for all primary and secondary school principals. Sessions for the employee assistance program have been extended and are now available from 9 am to 5 pm on weekends. Principals may also find Converge International's online magazine *Flourish* a useful resource for managing wellbeing. Work health checks will continue, with minor changes.

In the Diocese of Ballarat, principal and staff wellbeing services are available through [Converge International](#). Sessions for the employee assistance program have been extended and are now available from 9 am to 5 pm on weekends. Principals and staff may also find Converge International's online magazine *Flourish* a useful resource for managing wellbeing.

Principals in the Diocese of Sandhurst can contact [AccessEAP](#) for 24/7 employee assistance by calling 1800 818 728, making an online booking or using the EAP in Focus app.

Counselling is also available for staff from the AccessEAP employee assistance program, which is a confidential, free-of-charge service.

Staff and student vaccinations

As part of the COVID-19 vaccination rollout, all school staff and all students aged 12 and over are now eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

Information about vaccines and eligibility can be found on the [Coronavirus Victoria 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.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect yourself, your colleagues and students, and keep the whole school community safe. Getting vaccinated will help slow the spread of COVID-19 and prevent future outbreaks in our schools.

Vaccination is not mandatory for students; however, in alignment with health advice, 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 your 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).

Ventilation

Schools are required to increase fresh airflow into indoor spaces (including shared spaces, staff areas and thoroughfares) whenever possible and to maximise the use of outdoor learning areas or environments.

Natural ventilation

Keep all windows, doors and vents open as much as possible.

Keep these openings clear of any obstruction to airflow.

Door jambs should be used to keep doors open.

Aim to open windows and vents that are higher or towards the ceiling during poor or windy weather.

Exhaust fans are to be used as much as possible.
Take measures to maintain thermal, noise and other comfort, such as flexible uniform and seating arrangements.

Mechanical ventilation

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

Not all mechanical systems can operate using outside air (for example, most split systems). Air conditioners that are unable to bring in outside air should not be considered as providing mechanical ventilation.

Demand-controlled ventilation controls that reduce air supply based on occupancy or temperature should be disabled.

Air conditioning filters should be maintained according to maintenance plans, checked and cleaned.

Turn on mechanical ventilation, where available and practicable, to run systems during school hours including when rooms are unoccupied, and ideally two hours before and after the use of a space. Where available, timers can be used to manage operation.

Use of natural and mechanical ventilation at the same time

Natural and mechanical ventilation should be used together as much as practical and possible.

Air conditioners may be used to provide thermal comfort; however, if they cannot use outside air, then they need to be used with other ventilation strategies.

Using more than one ventilation method provides greater opportunity to create a comfortable learning environment and maximises ventilation.

Use of fans

Fans are only recommended to be used with other natural and mechanical methods in place.

Ceiling fans should be operated on the winter setting (where possible) and lowest speed.

Other fans, such as pedestal fans, should not be directed to blow air from one person directly past another and should be set to the lowest speed.

Bathrooms, kitchens and thoroughfares (hallways, corridors)

All available mechanical and natural ventilation options in bathrooms and kitchens should be operated for as much of the day as possible.

Maximise natural and/or mechanical ventilation in thoroughfares and minimise gathering in these spaces.

The use of enclosed spaces with little or no ventilation should be minimised.

Poor outdoor air quality

Action to protect students during periods of poor outdoor air quality (such as smoke or thunderstorm asthma events) takes priority.

Monitor the VicEmergency app for risk warnings and advice on thunderstorm asthma, smoke and other events reducing outside air quality.

Take steps to close windows and doors, set air conditioners to recirculate air, and enhance other COVIDSafe behaviours and controls, including cohorting, reducing class density and staggering classes until the risk is reduced.

Further advice on how to maximise ventilation will be provided separately.

Schools are encouraged to avoid or reduce the use of spaces that can't be ventilated with fresh outdoor air, including spaces with windows that don't open or open to environments with poor air quality or other pollutants. Rotate the use of spaces that can be well-ventilated if required.

Maximise the use of outdoor learning areas or environments

Schools are encouraged to maximise the use of outdoor learning areas and environments.

Prioritise the use of an outdoor space over an indoor space where, whenever and as much as practicable.

Air purifiers

The Victorian Government is delivering air purifier units (model Samsung AX7500) to most Catholic schools. User manuals will be delivered with each unit and should be kept in the same room as each unit for reference. A copy can also be downloaded from the Samsung website.

Air purifiers are advised to be prioritised for higher risk areas. These areas include where there are high levels of mixing of staff and reduced mask use when eating, higher levels of exertion and increased aerosol projection, and lower ventilation and possible exposure to illness. For example, sick bays, staffrooms, canteens, school receptions and student centres, gymnasiums and music rooms.

Vital COVIDSafe steps

Non-classroom based activities

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 completed in a COVIDSafe manner, for example completed in smaller groups or conducted outside.

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 four weeks of term one wherever feasible. Staff who are attending school under critical workforce exemptions should not attend face-to-face staff meetings.

Social distancing

Maintain physical distancing

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

Staff must practise physical distancing of 1.5 metres 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 as far as possible the use of common areas such as staffrooms. Staff should eat and drink outside wherever possible and practicable.

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 utilised to reduce risk.

Strategies that can be considered to support physical distancing include:

- rostering access to shared spaces, limiting time in these spaces and promoting breaks outdoors

- carefully managing the movement of adults through all common areas, including school reception and staffrooms, and the 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

- providing signage and rostering so that access to shared physical spaces and food preparation areas can be managed in line with density limits and to reduce congregation in entries and exits

- 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 and floor markings where appropriate

- marking the floor indicating physical distancing in appropriate locations (e.g. canteens, staffrooms and reception areas)

- taking action to reduce the congregation of adults around the school and reduce congestion. Schools can do this through strategies such as using multiple entry/exit points, creating spaces for ingress and egress in different areas of the school, and installing appropriate signage to communicate expected behaviours

- communicating the strategies in place to parents through local signage and communications to school communities to remind staff, students and families of the need for behaviours that support physical distancing.

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 large spaces (e.g. halls)

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

Consider opportunities to adapt indoor activities outdoors, for example holding classes outside. Staffrooms should be closed except for access to tea/coffee/food-making facilities. Where possible, staff are to rest, eat and meet in outdoor areas only.

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

For activities occurring outdoors, schools should 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 concentrations of students and minimise parents on site.

Face masks

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

For all school settings:

- Teachers 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 eight years old must wear a face mask when travelling to and from school on public transport, taxis or ride share vehicles.

- School staff must wear a face mask in all indoor settings, except where removal of a face mask is necessary for effective communication.

- Visitors to schools aged eight 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 a number of 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 mental health condition. Parent/carers of a student/s who meet the criteria for an exception must 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 medical exception for not wearing a face mask from a medical practitioner.

Outside of lawful exceptions, schools must 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.

Infection prevention and control

Practise good hygiene

All staff, students and visitors to schools should undertake regular hand hygiene, particularly on arrival to school, before and after eating, after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the toilet. Staff should direct or supervise young students where required.

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

Sharing of food is not permitted.

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

Ensure the highest hygiene practices among food handlers where these services are operating, as per the Department of Education and Training's Safe Food Handling Guidance.

Keep surfaces clean

COVIDSafe routine cleaning arrangements will continue for all Victorian Catholic schools in Term 4. This involves daily end-of-school-day cleaning, with a particular focus on cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces, and the inclusion of some elements that were not cleaned every day prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

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

will reduce the need for multiple people to touch the door handle. Consider use of plexiglass as a physical barrier at school reception and canteen, where practical and feasible.

Stay home when unwell and get tested

The most important action school communities can take to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 is to ensure that any unwell staff and students remain at home and get tested, even with the mildest of symptoms. Everyone should consider their health before they start work or attend school, and ensure that they are free from coronavirus symptoms and have not had contact in the past 14 days with a person confirmed or suspected to have coronavirus.