

6 September 2021

Dear Principals and non-school senior secondary providers

Onsite attendance for preparation and participation in Permitted Essential Assessments

The Acting Chief Health Officer (CHO) has approved additional studies (see following page) to the restricted list of Permitted Essential Assessments for students enrolled to attend onsite from Monday 6 September 2021.

In conducting Permitted Essential Assessments onsite, all providers must follow all COVID-Safe Settings and Department of Education and Training guidelines (including guidance as outlined in the **School Operations Guide**) as well as specific **Health Controls for Essential Assessments (Attachment 1)**. Due to the number of mystery cases in the community and the large number of young people impacted in this outbreak, additional public health measures for Victorian students undergoing onsite assessments this week will be in place.

The Health Controls from Monday 6 September 2021 include:

- Students who live in **metropolitan Melbourne**, attending onsite for Permitted Essential Assessments in Performing Arts studies, must be tested in the 72 hours before attending onsite.
- For Permitted Essential Assessments **added** from Monday 6 September 2021 the preference is that for attendance on **Monday/Tuesday** that students who live in **metropolitan Melbourne** have a COVID-19 test prior to attending onsite, if possible. If this is not possible, students must be tested immediately after being onsite (and no later than 48 hours after).
- For Permitted Essential Assessments **added** from Monday 6 September 2021 the preference is that for attendance from **Wednesday** that students who live in **metropolitan Melbourne** must be tested in the 72 hours before attending onsite for assessments.
- Evidence of a negative test result is not required before the assessment but must be provided to the school on request. Students can attend the assessment with their test result still pending but must advise the school immediately if they subsequently receive a positive result. This asymptomatic, surveillance testing approach is one currently used during outbreak periods and as such, students are not required to isolate after they get tested while they wait for their result.
- **From Monday 6 September 2021, Students who live in regional Victoria are strongly recommended, but not required, to have a COVID-19 test to attend onsite for Permitted Essential Assessments.** Students who live in metropolitan Melbourne but travel to school in regional Victoria must continue to be tested. Students who live in regional Victoria but travel to school in metropolitan Melbourne must also be tested.
- All Permitted Essential Assessments to be conducted onsite are capped at a maximum of 10 participants per session.

COVID-19 testing sites have been informed of these requirements and will not require students to provide evidence to support asymptomatic testing.

Performing Arts studies were prioritised last week due to performance examination starting on 4 October 2021. The additional selected VCE VET programs are a priority as these programs have significant practical requirements to complete the third and final task for School-Assessed Coursework (SAC). These programs have equipment or materials requirements that are not available to students in any location other than the training environment.

Permitted Essential Assessment for attendance onsite from **Monday 6 September 2021**

These additional listed VCE VET programs at Unit 3-4 level only:

- Engineering Studies (VCE VET)
- Integrated Technologies (VCE VET)
- Furnishing (VCE VET)
- Hospitality Kitchen Operations (VCE VET)
- Music Sound Production (VCE VET)
- Music Style and Composition
- Laboratory Skills (VCE VET)


Continuing Permitted Essential Assessments for attendance onsite in Performing Arts studies at Unit 3/4 level only (existing studies):

- Dance
- Dance (VCE VET)
- Drama
- Music Performance
- Music Investigation
- Music Performance (VCE VET)
- Theatre Studies

Attendance onsite is restricted strictly to those participating in essential assessments for these VCE studies/VCE VET programs where they cannot be conducted remotely.

For operational advice on implementation of existing and additional health controls, including cleaning, venue density and arrival and departure arrangements please contact the DET COVID-19 hotline: on 1800 338 663. This operates from 8am to 6pm seven days a week.

Regards,



STEPHEN GNIEL

Chief Executive Officer

cc: All VCE coordinators, VASS administrators, VCAL and VET coordinators (via email addresses registered in VASS)

Onsite attendance for preparation and participation in Essential Assessments

In conducting permitted Essential Assessments onsite, all providers must follow all [COVID-Safe Settings](#) and Department of Education and Training guidelines (including guidance as outlined in [School Operations Guide](#)) as well as **specific health controls for Essential Assessments for VCE and VCAL** (defined in Attachment 1).

Schools and non-school secondary providers must delay essential assessments where it is not possible to access the school site. For those schools and non-school secondary providers that have made arrangements for assessments to be conducted remotely with assurance of validity, this can continue.

Permitted Essential Assessment for attendance onsite from Monday 30 August 2021

- Dance
- Dance (VCE VET)
- Drama
- Music Performance
- Music Investigation
- Music Performance (VCE VET)
- Theatre Studies

Permitted Essential Assessment for attendance onsite from Monday 6 September 2021

- Engineering Studies (VCE VET)
- Integrated Technologies (VCE VET)
- Furnishing (VCE VET)
- Hospitality Kitchen Operations (VCE VET)
- Music Sound Production (VCE VET)
- Music Style and Composition
- Laboratory Skills (VCE VET)

Specific Health Controls for the conduct of permitted Essential Assessments – 2021 that cannot be conducted remotely or delayed – Updated 6 September 2021

Activity	Existing Controls (statewide) As outlined in the School Operations Guide	Additional controls for onsite assessment
<p><u>COVID-19 testing requirements for students permitted onsite for preparation and participation in Permitted Essential Assessments</u></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students who live in metropolitan Melbourne, attending on site for Permitted Essential Assessments in Performing Arts studies, must be tested in the 72 hours before attending onsite. For Permitted Essential Assessments added from Monday 6 September 2021 the preference is that for attendance on Monday/Tuesday that students who live in metropolitan Melbourne have a COVID-19 test prior to attending onsite, if possible. If this is not possible, students must be tested immediately after being on site (and no later than 48 hours after). For Permitted Essential Assessments added from Monday 6 September 2021 the preference is that for attendance from Wednesday that students who live in metropolitan Melbourne must be tested in the 72 hours before attending on site for assessments. Evidence of a negative test result is not required before the assessment but must be provided to the school on request. Students can attend the assessment with their test result still pending but must advise the school immediately if they subsequently receive a positive result. This asymptomatic, surveillance testing approach is one currently used during outbreak periods and as such, students are not required to isolate after they get tested while they wait for their result.

Activity	Existing Controls (statewide) As outlined in the School Operations Guide	Additional controls for onsite assessment
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From Monday 6 September 2021, Students who live in regional Victoria are strongly recommended, but not required, to have a COVID-19 test to attend on site for Permitted Essential Assessments. Students who live in metropolitan Melbourne but travel to school in regional Victoria must continue to be tested. Students who live in regional Victoria but travel to school in metropolitan Melbourne must also be tested.
<p><u>Onsite attendance for preparation and participation in Permitted Essential Assessments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dance Dance (VCE VET) Drama Music Performance Music Investigation Music Style and Composition Music Performance (VCE VET) Theatre Studies Engineering Studies (VCE VET) Integrated Technologies (VCE VET) Furnishing (VCE VET) Hospitality Kitchen Operations (VCE VET) Music Sound Production (VCE 	<p>Ensure physical distancing (1.5m distance)</p>	<p>School-based essential assessments and examination preparation, where they cannot be conducted remotely or delayed, can be conducted on site in groups of no more than ten students at a time.</p> <p>Schools should select the largest area in which to hold the assessment/examination preparation and maximise natural ventilation with students and staff spread out across as many separate spaces as practical for the assessment venue.</p> <p>The maximum number of individuals (including students) in any one indoor space must not exceed the venue density quotient of 1 person per 4 square metres, or up to 10 students, whichever is the smaller, with no less than 1.5 metres between desks/workstations.</p> <p>Consider use of Perspex screens between students and examiners if practical</p> <p>Arrival and departure mandatory processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local arrangements to be in place to limit congregation of students and parents/carers in and around the assessment venue. Access onsite should be limited to staff and students only unless it is essential for a parent/carer to be on site.

Activity	Existing Controls (statewide) As outlined in the School Operations Guide	Additional controls for onsite assessment
<p>VET)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laboratory Skills (VCE VET) <p>Only assessments that are unable to be conducted via remote learning or delayed</p>	<p>Students and staff must stay home if they are unwell.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment times must be staggered to limit opportunities for unnecessary interaction between students arriving and departing the venue. <p>Students and staff should be alerted that prior to attending onsite that they will be required to complete an attestation when they arrive onsite.</p> <p>School staff should conduct a risk assessment of all students and staff attending onsite. Ask the student or staff member if they have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> symptoms that could be consistent with COVID-19 (for example, cough, sore throat, fever, shortness of breath or runny nose) had contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 visited a known exposure site - https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/case-locations-and-outbreaks-covid-19 live in or visited a geographically localised area at higher risk as determined by public health or have recently been released from a quarantine facility. Been advised to self-isolate or self-quarantine for another reason <p>If they answer 'yes' to any of the above, they should not attend onsite.</p> <p>Ask the student if they have had a COVID-19 test in accordance with the COVID-19 testing requirements for students permitted on-site for preparation and participation in Permitted Essential Assessments above.</p>

Activity	Existing Controls (statewide) As outlined in the School Operations Guide	Additional controls for onsite assessment
	Hand sanitiser made available at entry points to classrooms/assessment spaces.	Students should use hand sanitiser on entry.
	Wear face coverings in line with community requirements.	<p>Schools must ensure there is adequate supply of disposable face masks to provide to students who do not have a face mask.</p> <p>Face masks must be worn at all times by students and staff when travelling to and from an assessment and indoors and outdoors at the assessment venue (lawful reasons for not wearing a face mask continue to apply.)</p>
	Promote fresh air flow indoors where feasible and do not have air conditioners on recirculate	<p>Where practicable, consider conducting assessments outdoors.</p> <p>Schools must ensure fresh air flow into assessment spaces, by opening windows.</p> <p>Door jambs must be used to keep air circulating through open doors.</p> <p>Air recirculation must be eliminated or minimised by setting air conditioning units to use external air rather than recycling.</p> <p>Where applicable, communications should be provided to students and families prior to the assessment regarding ventilation strategies in order for students to consider additional layers of clothing to minimise potential discomfort.</p>
	Mandatory use of Service Victoria QR codes for visitors. Schools are required to	<p>Strict register of attendance and seating plan for student.</p> <p>All staff and other invigilators involved in the delivery of the assessment must sign in using the QR code.</p>

Activity	Existing Controls (statewide) As outlined in the School Operations Guide	Additional controls for onsite assessment
	collect and keep an accurate register of student and staff attendance.	
	Reduce mixing between groups	<p>Wherever possible, assessments must only take place with students from within a single school.</p> <p>Students only to be given access to assessment areas – no communal or shared spaces (e.g. year level centres, library etc.) to be made available for study before or after an assessment. If needed, dedicated holding spaces should be made for each assessment to avoid mixing between students sitting different assessments.</p>
	COVIDSafe routine cleaning arrangements. Daily end-of-school-day cleaning, with a particular focus on cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces.	<p>Schools must limit, where possible, the use of single assessment spaces to one assessment per day.</p> <p>Any assessment spaces and associated high touch areas used for the purpose of multiple assessments per day should be cleaned and disinfected between groups.</p>
	Student(s) displaying COVID-19 symptoms, to be isolated while they await collection by a parent or carer as per management of students displaying COVID-19 symptoms in education settings	Schools must ensure there are adequate staff available who are confident in the use of personal protective equipment available to safely manage these students, and there is a suitable area where the student can be isolated while awaiting collection.

Activity	Existing Controls (statewide) As outlined in the School Operations Guide	Additional controls for onsite assessment
<p><u>Additional mandatory controls for onsite attendance for preparation and participation in Permitted Essential Assessments</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance • Dance (VCE VET) • Drama • Music Performance • Music Style and Composition • Music Investigation • Music Performance (VCE VET) • Music Sound Production (VCE VET) 	<p>Singing and playing wind and brass instruments can occur if Department of Health recommendations to reduce transmission risk are followed.</p> <p>Recommendations include moving outdoors, increasing ventilation, physical distancing of 2 metres between performers and 5 metres between performers and the audience, reducing the number of people, or reducing the length of time an activity is conducted. Further advice on ways to reduce risk can be found in Appendix 1 and DH guidance: COVID-19 transmission from air-circulating, wind-blowing devices and activities.</p>	<p>Where practicable, individual student assessment is preferred. Where assessments must be conducted in a group, group size should be minimised as much as possible and not exceed 10 students.</p> <p>Face coverings can be removed for the purpose of a performance where appropriate – when face coverings are removed the distance between individuals should be maximised (minimum 2m) to the extent that still allows the performance to take place and both can hear or see each other. Face coverings should be used as much as practical for the purpose of rehearsals.</p> <p>Performances should be planned for in a way that aims to minimise prolonged face to face contact between performers.</p> <p>Musical instruments should not be shared. An exception would be large percussion instruments (e.g. marimba) that can be wiped with a disinfectant/detergent wipe between use.</p> <p>If there is considerable contact with floor during a dance/drama performance, cleaning and disinfection of the floor between performances where possible is recommended.</p> <p>Given the possibility of respiratory droplet spread with wind instruments etc., recommend cleaning and disinfection of the floor between relevant music performances, where possible.</p> <p>Music students should be actively reminded to undertake hand hygiene regularly, especially before and after cleaning their instrument.</p> <p>See Appendix 1- Additional infection prevention advice for further details.</p>



Additional infection control prevention advice

Can playing musical instruments pose a risk?

Aerosol generation during the use of certain musical instruments is influenced by factors like the changing of dynamic levels, articulation pattern and breathing technique (He, Gao, Trifonov, & Hong, 2021). The tube structure (for example, tube length, turnings and valves) and mouthpiece design (for example, air-jet, single reed or double reed) of the instrument may also influence the concentration and size of aerosol produced.

Some instruments pose a higher risk of aerosol generation than others. Based on aerosol generating capabilities compared to normal speaking and breathing, wind instruments can be categorised into low (for example, tuba), intermediate (for example, bassoon, piccolo, flute, bass clarinet, French horn and clarinet) and high-risk (for example, trumpet, bass, trombone and oboe).

Higher risk instruments generate more aerosols of a smaller aerosol size when played, in comparison to lower risk instruments and speaking. It is this generation of greater numbers of aerosol particles (which may contain infectious virus) that increases the risk of airborne disease transmission.

Other high-risk routes of transmission of COVID-19 when playing instruments include:

- breath condensation and saliva collection in some instruments after playing
- sharing and touching of reeds
- playing or using shared instruments (for example, piano and microphone) without proper hand hygiene prior to commencing.

Appropriate collection and disposal of condensation and saliva should always be practised. Hand hygiene should be performed before and after playing shared musical instruments, and surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected between each use.

Can wind and brass instruments be used?

When there is no active community transmission of COVID-19, the theoretical risk of disease transmission from playing wind and brass instruments is very low. When there is active community transmission of COVID-19, wind and brass musical instruments may still be used; however, additional measures are required to mitigate or reduce the risk of infection transmission. Examples of these include the following:

- Playing musical instruments outdoors will significantly reduce the risk of infection transmission.
- Reducing the number of people present in an indoor space. This might entail changed seating arrangements for different musical activities involving the use of wind and brass instruments, including orchestras, bands or music classes. The maximum number of individuals allowed in a given space should follow density limits set by the Department of Health.
- Incorporating additional physical distancing between the musicians. Musicians playing high-risk instruments should be at least two metres apart (to account for the length of the instrument) and distance between those playing wind instruments and other musicians should be maximised as much as possible.
- The audience should be distanced as far as practical from brass and wind musicians. With indoor performances, the audience may be required to wear a face mask if required by local restrictions.
- Room ventilation enhancement (for example, open windows) is important.

- Performers playing non-wind instruments (for example, percussion and string players) should wear face masks if performing in settings where face masks are required by local restrictions.
- Users of brass instruments should monitor and drain their breath condensate ('spit valve') regularly. Musicians must drain this fluid and dispose of it in a rubbish bin and then perform hand hygiene.
- Wind instruments are for individual use and should not be shared unless thoroughly cleaned and disinfected before reuse.
- The use of a barrier cap on the bell end of a brass instrument offers a significant reduction in release of respiratory aerosols into the immediate surroundings. This is a possible mitigation method for playing in groups, especially in hard to ventilate spaces.

Are choirs safe?

During singing, droplets and aerosols are emitted and can follow ambient airflow patterns in a space (Bahl et al., 2020). If infectious individuals are present, group singing may transmit COVID-19 and the longer the singing, the greater the risk. Singing inside in a poorly ventilated area with infectious singers that are not physically distanced has been shown to be associated with the spread of COVID-19 amongst the group (Hamner et al., 2020). Humming and singing softly have been shown to be of lower risk for aerosol production.

When there is no active community transmission of COVID-19, the risk of droplet and aerosol transmission from choral singing is low, so normal practices may be permitted. When there is active community transmission of COVID-19, singing in group settings is less safe and additional precautions are needed to reduce or mitigate transmission of COVID-19.

It is important to assess the state of health of anyone attending group singing to ensure the safety of others. People at high-risk of severe illness (that is, any signs or symptoms of COVID-19) should not participate in group singing while there is active community transmission of COVID-19.

Examples of strategies that can be applied to reduce risk of infection transmission include:

- singing outside or in a well-ventilated room (with windows open)
- physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres while singing in groups
- shorter performances (of less than an hour)
- running singing lessons, classes or practices outdoors if practical
- use of glass-paned rooms
- running singing lessons, classes or practice sessions virtually.