

School Operations Guide

Term 1, from Monday 28 February

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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 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 of Education and Training will distribute rapid antigen test kits directly to schools for use throughout 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 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 staff and ad hoc 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, in order 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 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 surveillance testing for 30 days.

Staff must report a positive result to their school 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.

For questions regarding the delivery or supply of rapid antigen tests for your school, please contact your Regional General Manager or diocesan education office contact.

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 is no longer required. The revised process is set out below.

Principal actions: identification and notification

1. Parents/carers should inform the school by phone or written notification. Principals should then follow the process put in place by their diocesan education office.
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 (see the Staff Leave section for more information). 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 *Exemptions for staff who are household contacts*).
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 activities

The 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. Ensure that staff or students refrain from returning to school if they remain symptomatic, unless it is known that their symptoms are caused by an underlying health condition or medication.
8. New self-serve templates for principals to use in the event of a positive case associated with the school are now 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

Employees who contract COVID-19 whilst undertaking duties in the workplace will be eligible for the Infectious disease leave under clause 36 of the VCMEA 2018. Principals are encouraged to contact the ER Unit (CEOIR@macs.vic.edu.au) or their local Diocesan office for support in determining the appropriate leave type. For employees who are required to isolate based on being determined a close contact at school, the school can consider alternate duties remotely or alternatively miscellaneous leave for up to five days

Employees who contract COVID-19 or are required to isolate with no connection to the workplace can access personal leave.

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	<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 report positive student cases via the process established by the diocesan education office.</p> <p>Staff members must report a positive test result and submit a leave request.</p> <p>The school should notify school community that there has been a case at the school using the communication templates available.</p>
<p>A student or staff member is a household contact or household-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><i>Contact at school is not included in this definition, unless contact has occurred in a school-based residential setting, e.g. school camp or boarding school.</i></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 (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>No further action.</p>

Scenario	Required actions for the student/family	Required actions for the school
A student or staff member has been in contact with a case of COVID-19, including at school or at work.	<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, and if well enough, the student/staff member can return to school.</p> <p>If staff/students are too unwell to attend school, usual leave/absence policies apply.</p> <p>Follow the 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>
Staff/student has contracted COVID-19, completed their 7-day isolation period and is asymptomatic.	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.	The school should confirm that the staff/student has completed their 7-day isolation period.
<p>Staff member/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 household has returned a positive result.</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 household, the quarantine end date for the close contact is unchanged.</p> <p>Staff/ students can safely return to school and do not</p>	No further action

Scenario	Required actions for the student/family	Required actions for the school
	<p>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>	The school should notify their diocesan education officer of the change in status of a student.

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 order 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.](#)

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 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 to their school.
- Staff are required to log onto eHR or PRS 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.

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 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).

Leave to attend vaccination appointments will not be deducted from personal leave. Staff scheduling these appointments should consult with their principal where this will require time away from school. Principals are asked to continue to provide staff with the flexibility to access vaccination appointment attendance. In the event an employee has an adverse reaction to a dose of COVID-19 vaccine, any leave required must be taken as personal leave.

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).
- Diocesan education office staff who attend an education facility (such as allied health personnel), except where you are advised that equivalent processes exist at a diocesan level.
- 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.

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 Catholic 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.

Liturgies and sacramental celebrations

Liturgies and sacramental celebrations held by a school on school grounds are governed by school settings and the advice contained in this Guide must be followed.

Liturgies and sacraments held by parishes or community groups on school grounds are governed by the [Sector guidance](#) detailed below in the section 'use of school facilities by community and sports groups'.

In all cases, individuals attending school grounds for liturgies or sacramental celebrations must comply with the vaccination requirements detailed above.

Liturgies and sacramental celebrations that are held by parishes in parish churches are not school settings. Those celebrations are governed by the [current COVIDSafe settings](#) in place. The organiser of these events, such as the parish, is responsible for ensuring that the event is COVIDSafe.

Advice for parishes on COVIDSafe settings is available from their respective dioceses:

- [Archdiocese of Melbourne](#)
- [Diocese of Ballarat](#)
- [Diocese of Sale](#)
- [Diocese of Sandhurst](#)

Community use of school facilities

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 <i>Competition and training, or entry-level “come and try” days overseen by a state sporting association or equivalent governing body</i> <i>(e.g., AFL Victoria and AusKick; Cricket Victoria and Cricket Blast)</i>	Yes	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	Not required.
	No	<p>Schools will need to request vaccination information of community sport staff or workers.</p> <p>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.</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>
Other community groups	N/A	Schools will need to request evidence of vaccination of external 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

Community groups will need to request vaccination information relevant to their sector.

names with vaccination status is sufficient.

Community groups are required to sight and/or collect vaccination information relevant to their sector.

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

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, wellbeing services for principals and staff 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.

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.

Cleaning and maintenance of air purifiers

Each school is responsible for the general maintenance and cleaning of their air purifiers.

There are 3 elements of the purifier that require cleaning and/or replacement:

1. Surface: schools should clean the surface of the device regularly in line with the manufacturer's guidance. Contract cleaners should treat the air purifiers in a similar way to other electrical items, which normally includes dusting.
2. Pre-filters: each air purifier has 2 pre-filters which are visible once the front cover of the device is unclipped. Schools should clean the pre-filter every 5 to 6 weeks when the purifier is being used every weekday – or twice per term. For further information please see below.
3. HEPA filters: each air purifier has 2 HEPA filters which are visible once the front cover of the device is unclipped. The device will alert when the HEPA filters require replacement. This is estimated to be approximately every 6 to 12 months. Schools should undertake the filter change when this occurs. Replacement HEPA filters will be provided to schools. For further information please see below.

As with all electrical equipment, air purifiers also require testing and tagging.

Single-use surgical masks and gloves are recommended to be worn when cleaning pre-filters or replacing HEPA filters, for general hygiene purposes. Hand hygiene should be performed after cleaning and maintenance.

It is recommended that air purifier maintenance is undertaken in a well-ventilated space, if possible.

No action is required to the cleaning of the pre-filter or replacement of the HEPA filter if confirmed COVID-19 cases have been in the room where an air purifier has been running.

Cleaning the pre-filters

The pre-filters should be cleaned every 5 to 6 weeks when the purifier is being used every weekday (or twice per term) – for example, this could be done mid-term and towards the end of term. Note that this is based on the expected usage profile in a school setting and is different to the recommendation of every 2 weeks in the manufacturer's manual, which is based on 24/7 usage, and has been confirmed with the manufacturer.

Removing the pre-filter does not require tools – the pre-filters clip into the device in front of the HEPA filter. For further information on how to remove the pre-filter for cleaning, please refer to the user manual.

There are 3 ways to clean a pre-filter:

1. Pre-filters can be cleaned with a duster or soft brush to remove dust. This is recommended to be undertaken outside.
2. Pre-filters can be vacuumed to remove dust. This can be done within the immediate vicinity of the air purifier unit. Where possible, it is preferable to use a vacuum cleaner equipped with a HEPA filter, but this is not a necessity.

3. Pre-filters can be washed with water. It is important that pre-filters are completely dry before being re-inserted into the air purifier. This prevents the HEPA filter from getting wet which can damage the filter's integrity. To speed up drying time, it is recommended that filters are initially manually dried with an absorbent cloth (such as a microfibre cloth) and left to air dry (away from direct sunlight) before being reinstalled into the device.

Replacing the HEPA filter

Replacement of the HEPA filter should occur when the device alerts. Both HEPA filters in the device should be replaced at this time.

Replacement of filters does not require tools, they clip into the device behind the pre-filter (the pre-filter must be removed before replacing the HEPA filter). For further information on how to replace the HEPA filter, please refer to the user manual.

It is recommended that used HEPA filters are placed in a sealed bag and then disposed of in general waste.

Replacement HEPA filters are being provided to schools with deliveries to continue throughout Term 1 2022.

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 small 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
- 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.

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. 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 from your diocesan education office.

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.

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.

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. QR code and electronic recordkeeping requirements still apply to support exposure notification.

School events

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

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. Students must wear face masks even if vaccinated. Students are not required to wear masks outside, however they are strongly recommended if physical distance cannot be maintained, even outdoors, 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 eight years old must wear a face mask when travelling to and from school on public transport, taxis or ride share vehicles.
- Visitors to schools aged 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](#).

School Cleaning Arrangements

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

Cleaning following a confirmed COVID-19 case

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