

Best Practice COVID-19 Workplace Safety: Schools

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This information provides best practice guidance to help schools manage COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory viruses, safely.

Please use this information alongside other Tasmanian Public Health guidance including *Best Practice COVID-19 Safety: for Employers*.

Public Health recommends all workplaces comply with work health and safety requirements and:

- undertake a COVID-19 risk assessment
- develop and maintain policies and procedures to minimise the chances of COVID-19 and other infectious illnesses spreading within the workplace
- use best practice guidance to inform those policies and procedures.

COVID-19 requirements

Under the *Public Health Act 1997*:

- people who test positive to COVID-19 must:
 - isolate for at least seven days from the date of their positive test result; this includes people living in disability residential settings
 - inform Public Health of their positive result if they used a rapid antigen test (RAT)
- close contacts of people who test positive to COVID-19 must:
 - inform their employer that they are a close contact
 - test daily for COVID-19 every day they leave their home, for seven days from becoming a close contact
 - wear a facemask (unless exempt) in indoor settings outside the home
 - isolate and test immediately if they have any symptoms.

People with symptoms

Public Health strongly recommends anyone with acute (or new) respiratory symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat and/or runny nose, to stay at home, even if those symptoms are mild, and get tested for COVID-19. Testing can be by PCR laboratory test or RAT.

If the result is negative and the person still has acute symptoms, they should stay at home and repeat the test in the next 24-48 hours.

If the result is negative the second time and they still have acute symptoms, they should stay at home until the symptoms resolve completely or there is significant improvement. There are other respiratory viruses, including influenza viruses, that can cause serious illness in some people, and spread easily from person to person.

Anyone with a fever, who feels unwell or has any increase in symptoms should stay home even if they test negative for COVID-19.

If symptoms have resolved or mostly gone, they can return to work/school. If some mild symptoms remain, Public Health recommends they wear a face mask when away from home.

If the person has any concerns, or is unsure if their symptoms are improving, Public Health recommends they seek medical advice.

Best practice COVID-19 control measures for schools

1. Planning

- Maintain and use your COVID-19 safety plan.
- Maintain your COVID-19 outbreak management plan and consider including influenza within its scope. See the *Case and Outbreak Management Framework for Tasmanian Settings* and related tools.
- Stay informed about the level of risk in the local community and control measures in place or recommended.

2. Vaccination

See *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Vaccination*.

COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for people aged five years and older, including pregnant women.

Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone aged six months and older, including pregnant women.

- Recommend workers and families be up to date with vaccination against COVID-19 and influenza.

3. Workers and students with symptoms

- Advise workers and students (including through their parents/carers) with any symptoms of COVID-19 (including fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose) to get tested for COVID-19.

The management of COVID-19 continues to evolve, and as evidence accumulates, advice may be revised. Updates are available at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au. If any information in this factsheet is inconsistent with information on that website, please use the information online.

- Advise workers and students with symptoms to get tested again the next day if their initial result is negative.
- Advise workers and students with mild symptoms that they can return to work/school **if** they have tested negative for COVID-19 two days in a row **and** feel well despite their mild symptoms. If they feel unwell or have a fever, they should stay at home.
- Advise workers that, if they have mild symptoms and are at work, they are required to wear a face mask.
- Recommend workers and students with persistent or ongoing respiratory symptoms see their general practitioner or healthcare provider about controlling their symptoms.
- Maintain policies and procedures to manage students who develop signs of COVID-19 while at school. This includes requesting that students with symptoms are collected as soon as practicable.
- While students with symptoms await collection:
 - support them to distance from other students
 - provide and ask them to wear a single use surgical face mask (for children aged 12 years or older, and younger children who are happy to wear a mask)
 - minimise the number of workers caring for or supervising them.

4. Workers and students who test positive for COVID-19 or are close contacts of someone who has COVID-19

- Remind workers and students/families that, under the *Public Health Act 1997*, people who test positive to COVID-19 must isolate for at least seven days from the positive test result.
- Close contacts may attend school as a student or worker, **if** they have no symptoms **and** have had a negative COVID-19 test that day.
- Remind workers that they are obliged to inform their employer if they are a close contact of a person who has tested positive to COVID-19.
- Ensure any close contacts aged 12 years or older at the school wear a face mask in indoor spaces (unless exempt).

5. Ventilation

- See *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Ventilation*.
- Spend time outside and open doors and windows as safe and practicable.
- Maintain and use air conditioners, heaters and other mechanical ventilation devices, as safe and appropriate.

6. Face masks

- See *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Face masks*.
- Maintain a supply of single-use surgical face masks for workers and students.
- Support use of face masks by anyone who chooses to wear a mask or who is at risk of severe illness.

- Encourage use of face masks by anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 while on the school site.
- Encourage use of face masks in indoor settings where physical distancing is not feasible and airflow is poor. This may include school assemblies.

7. Support people at risk of severe illness

Those at risk of severe illness includes people who are not up to date with vaccination, people with specific underlying medical conditions, people with compromised immune systems, people aged 65 years and older, and pregnant women.

- Identify workers at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and strategies to minimise their risk of exposure to the virus.
- Record and take account of medical advice for any student at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

8. Physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning

- See *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Physical Distancing* and *Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Hygiene and Cleaning*.
- Remind adults in the setting to physically distance from each other, when feasible. In a school learning environment, physical distancing is most important between adults.
- Discourage gathering of parents at indoor arrival and departure points.
- Have processes in place to ensure hygiene practices are in line with national school standards.
- Support students to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue then put the tissue in the rubbish, or to cover coughs and sneezes with the inside of their elbow rather than their hands.
- Teach and support students to wash their hands effectively with soap and running water on arrival, before/after meals and after toileting, blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing and using shared equipment.
- Ensure alcohol-based hand gel, tissues and rubbish bins are readily available.
- Ensure appropriate cleaning and disinfection, with a focus on frequently touched surfaces. *Cleaning and disinfection of toys and equipment is not required after every use.*

Further information

- www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au
- Public Health
 - email: public.health@health.tas.gov.au
 - phone: 1800 671 738
- Tasmanian Schools COVID-19 Operational Plan

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