



ACT
Government

ACT Health

To Parents/Carers

ACT Health advice for returning to face to face learning in ACT public schools

With low case numbers and no evidence of community transmission in the ACT, the government has been able to relax some physical distancing measures. Furthermore, there have been no cases of COVID-19 resulting from transmission from a school student in the ACT and current Australian research shows there is very limited transmission from child to child, or from child to adult.

We know that students aged 3-19 years are not at increased risk in returning to face to face learning, and that good hygiene and environmental cleaning are the most important tools for reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmissions for staff and students in ACT public schools.

There is the potential for an increase in cases of COVID-19 as community restrictions are eased, especially for adults. To protect staff, students and families from this potential risk, a graduated return to face to face learning and work will be important, and physical distancing measures will need to continue for the adults within the school community. We also require the ability to respond quickly to cases when they appear, and if there is community transmission.

My office has worked with the ACT Education Directorate to develop a set of guidelines that will make our schools safe places for students to learn and for staff to work.

When schools are fully operational it is not practical or necessary for students to socially distance. The reality of full school operations is:

- Students and staff should not come to school if they are sick.
- The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee does not recommend regular temperature checking of students as there is limited evidence to suggest this is of value.
- Classes will have the usual number of students as well as staff members required to support the students. As an indication, this can be between 21 and 32 students across the primary and high school settings
- Students will be moving from class to class, using all areas of the school to transition between learning spaces

- During inclement weather, students will need to utilise all internal spaces. This means students may need to congregate in larger numbers in these internal spaces including classrooms and corridors

ACT public schools will be required to adhere to the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advice on reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. This includes:

- **Physical distancing for adults** - The greatest risk of transmission in the school environment is between adults over 25 years of age. Staff and parents should avoid long periods of time in close contact with other adults. Adults, including parents, staff and volunteers should maintain physical distancing between themselves and other adults. This includes at school drop-off and pick up, in the classroom and in the staff room.

Adults at the school should stick to the guidelines of maintaining 1.5 metres between themselves and no more than one adult per four square metres in an indoor environment (e.g. in staff tearooms). Where possible, parents are encouraged to drop their children off without entering the school grounds, noting that younger children and children with special needs may require some support.

Staff are encouraged to minimise the number of people in staff rooms and smaller office spaces at any one time. Staggering meal breaks may be one option schools can consider to reduce the number of staff congregating at one time.

- **Risks to vulnerable populations in schools** - Parents/carers of students with complex medical needs are encouraged to consult their medical practitioner to determine the suitability for onsite learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff who are aged 70 years and over, aged 65 years and over with chronic medical conditions, are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and over the age of 50 with chronic medical conditions, have compromised immune systems, or who are a full time carer of a person in one of the above categories, will be supported to work from home where possible.
- **Hygiene** - Good hygiene practices are important to preventing the spread of COVID-19. In ACT public schools all students and staff will be reminded to wash their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand-sanitiser on arrival and regularly throughout the day, cough into their elbows or a tissue, place used tissues straight into the bin, avoid touching eyes, noses or mouths, not share food or drink, not using water fountains or bubblers directly, and ensure strict hygiene in the preparation of food.

- **Environmental cleaning** - In each ACT public school, a school cleaning plan will be developed that will ensure regular cleaning of high touch surfaces (such as handrails and desks), frequently used objects (such as staff desk top computers), play equipment, and bathrooms, consistent with the AHPPC Statement. School play equipment that is used by the broader community will also be considered as part of the school cleaning plan.
- **Management of suspected and confirmed cases** - Staff, children or young people at school experiencing symptoms compatible with COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath) will be isolated in an appropriate space with suitable supervision and collected by a parent/carer as soon as possible. If the child can't remain isolated the staff member looking after the student will wear a mask and carry out frequent hand hygiene.

In the event that a staff member, student or family member is diagnosed with COVID-19, ACT Health will provide assistance to the school on further management. This may result in full or partial school closure while site cleaning and contact tracing is undertaken. A procedure has been developed and implemented to manage this situation.

- **Providing routine and emergency first-aid care** - Standard precautions need to be taken, as per normal procedures, for staff or volunteers who are providing routine care or first-aid assistance to students where they need to come into physical contact with a student (for example: nappy changing, assisting with toileting or feeding, attending to a cut or disposing of student's tissues).

Standard precautions include the '5 moments of hand hygiene', which includes washing your hands or using hand-sanitiser in the following instances: before physical contact, before a procedure or provision of care, after physical contact, after a body fluid exposure risk (for example after touching a student's tissue or providing first aid) and after contact with the student's surroundings (e.g. if a staff member has touched a student's chair/desk or other personal items or aids). For some personal care, additional PPE may be required, based on standard practice. For example, if staff or volunteers might come in contact with body fluids it is recommended that they wear an apron and gloves.

You can find more information about the ACT Government response to COVID-19 on our website: <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/>

I look forward to working with you on ensuring our children, staff and families have a safe environment in which to learn.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Coleman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Kerryn Coleman
ACT Chief Health Officer

6 May 2020