

# COVID-safe schools operational plan

Version 4.0\*

\*Plan to be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains up-to-date, complies with Public Health advice and continues to provide the best protection for children.

# Principle 1 – Early Education and Care (ECEC) services and schools are essential and should be the first to open and last to close wherever possible in outbreak situations, with face-to-face learning prioritised

## Learners

To keep our learners and staff as safe as possible, COVID-safe measures are in place in our schools in line with Public Health advice. These measures build on what schools are already doing.

COVID-safe measures include:

- hygiene and physical distancing
- vaccination
- ventilation and use of outdoor learning environments
- safe site management
- face masks
- outbreak management plans.

All students should be at school unless they:

- are unwell or have COVID-19 symptoms
- have medical advice which states they are unable to attend school due to an ongoing medical condition
- have been directed to stay home by Public Health.

Schools will continue to work closely with parents and carers to support students and young people with disability. Students who have individualised learning plans including students with English as an additional language, gifted and talented students, and students with disability will continue to be supported. Parents and carers can contact schools to discuss their child's individual learning plan.

## Launching into Learning

Launching into Learning (LiL) sessions can be held indoors in Schools and Child and Family Learning Centres (CFLCs) where it is possible to do so in a COVID-safe way.

Depending on school capacity, LiL teachers will continue to focus on outreach strategies to connect with families, including:

- facilitating outdoor LiL sessions, for example at local parks
- encouraging participation in the [Great Start online LiL sessions](#)
- encouraging participation in [Libraries Tasmania early learning sessions](#).

COVID-safe behaviours will apply to all sessions.

## Staff

The Department of Education is proactively reviewing its workforce to identify pressure points and put in place strategies to cover expected absences. This includes:

- contacting recently retired school staff
- revisiting long leave requests
- deploying staff from non-school areas, including both registered teachers and general staff
- using relief staff
- consideration of exemptions to enable close contacts to return to work, where all above options have been exhausted.

For Government schools, regional Human Resources (HR) teams support principals and schools with plans for staffing as they move through different stages of complexity at their site.

The Department of Education, the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office and Independent Schools Tasmania will advise schools on strategies to manage workforce absences to ensure face-to-face learning continues.

## Virtual learning

Schools are prepared to support children during any learning at home periods and will ensure the core curriculum continues to be delivered.

The Department of Education's Virtual Learning Centre (VLC) is an online learning service accessible by families, principals, teachers and learners.

Schools will continue to support learners to come to school and learn under the supervision of their classroom teacher. When this is not possible, schools will communicate to parents about the resources to support learners and this may include the VLC.

All learners needing access to VLC will be supported to access high quality online programs focussing on core areas of reading, writing, numbers, physical activity and wellbeing.

The Gifted Online program recommenced in Term 2.

All learners in Years 11 and 12 will have access to a wide range of courses through Virtual Learning Tasmania (VLT) with interactive support sessions available as needed.

Schools will be provided with central support to monitor student participation in VLC and develop strategies for supporting the transition to face-to-face learning.

Resources and equipment packs have also been developed for students in internet 'black spots' or facing other barriers to online learning.

The Department of Education works with the Catholic and Independent school sectors to align approaches and share virtual learning resources.

## Principle 2 – Baseline public health measures continue to apply

[COVID-safe measures](#) will be in place across all schools in line with Public Health advice, with all schools actively encouraging COVID-safe behaviour.

### Attendance and cleaning

Students, staff and visitors must stay home if unwell or if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

Students, staff and visitors must stay home if they are required to isolate after testing positive to COVID-19.

All schools will continue increased hygiene and handwashing. Handwashing and sanitising products are available in all schools.

All schools will continue increased COVID-safe cleaning, including additional disinfecting of high touch point surfaces and increasing ventilation following a positive case.

### Physical distancing

Physical distancing and density requirements help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

All staff and visitors must stay 1.5 metres apart and comply with density requirements such as maximum room capacity advice. Staff will limit unnecessary mixing.

COVID-safe behaviours are applied in staffrooms and offices, and students will be supported to physically distance *where possible*.

Schools will continue to limit unnecessary mixing between class/student groups where this is not required for learning.

### Face masks

[Face masks](#) are not mandatory indoors at schools, unless an individual is directed to wear a face mask by Public Health.

There may be times or situations where a school requires masks to be worn, and this could apply to staff, students or visitors.

Staff and visitors are encouraged to wear masks indoors where they cannot physically distance or when they expect to be in an enclosed space for an extended period of time.

Wearing a face mask is not a requirement for students but they will be supported and encouraged to wear masks should they choose to.

All staff, students and visitors should follow Public Health advice for mask wearing as it applies to the [current COVID-19 risk](#) for Tasmania.

Face masks will continue to be available for staff and students at all Tasmanian Government Schools.

Parents, carers and other visitors should wear masks when requested to by the school.

### Ventilation

Continuing to maximise airflow by increasing ventilation remains a key strategy to help minimise disease transmission. There are a number of ways to promote air flow and improve air quality. These include increasing natural airflow through opening windows and doors, the use of heaters and air conditioners, and

mechanical ventilation. Schools continue to ensure learning areas have good airflow and that indoor spaces are well ventilated.

The majority of external windows in Government schools can be opened and repairs continue as required.

All Government schools have been provided with air purifiers to assist with increased ventilation if required.

Maintenance of air conditioners and air purifier filters is ongoing.

Schools will continue to take advantage of outdoor learning opportunities and outdoor learning spaces where possible. Work is continuing in schools to identify further opportunities for outdoor learning and to enhance existing outdoor learning areas.

All Government schools have been provided a CO<sub>2</sub> monitor to assist with the provision of optimised ventilation.

Schools have been provided with guidance on how to improve ventilation in cooler weather. Electric portable fans and additional air purifiers will be used in schools to maximise ventilation and airflow and combined with heating to support enhanced ventilation during winter months.

## Vaccination

Vaccination continues to be the best way to reduce the severity of COVID-19 symptoms.

Department of Education staff, including volunteers, do not need to provide evidence of their COVID-19 vaccination status. All staff are highly recommended to receive their third (booster) dose, the additional winter booster dose for eligible cohorts, as well as influenza vaccination.

Students are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated for both COVID-19 and influenza.

Schools will not treat students differently based on their COVID-19 vaccination status.

Non-government school sectors are responsible for setting their own vaccination requirements as informed by Public Health advice.

Schools will continue to work with the Department of Health to support and promote vaccination clinics and to help increase vaccination and booster rates in both children and adults.

## COVID-19 case management

COVID-19 safety plans are regularly updated for all sites and they factor in relevant changes in Public Health advice.

COVID case management is guided by Public Health advice.

The management of COVID-19 in Tasmanian schools requires a collaborative approach between Public Health and the education sector. Together they support schools to continue to deliver face-to-face, high-quality education to students in a safe environment with minimal disruption.

Schools are well prepared to respond to increases in COVID cases and are supported by a central Support team including a dedicated coordinator for each Government school. Schools work closely with Public Health to identify:

- where there is an increasing number of cases within a school cohort
- when a significant transmission event has occurred
- when cases in staff are such that the school is unable to meet operational requirements

If the level of COVID cases in a school exceeds what would be expected in line with patterns of community transmission, the school communicates directly with families to provide instructions specific to their children.

This message may be as simple as to continue to monitor for symptoms. It is important to carefully read communications from schools and to follow Public Health advice. Additional measures may be put in place when there are increases in cases within schools, in consultation with Public Health which could include testing through rapid antigen tests (RATs), recommendations on wearing of face masks, or changes to school activities.

## Parent, carer and visitor access

Minimising the number of people who access school sites helps reduce the risk of transmission. Parents and carers are welcome in schools, but their time spent on-site should be limited and related to the activity being engaged in such as:

- child drop-off
- participation in Launching into Learning
- parent information sessions
- school assemblies.

On-site school community activities have increased supported by COVID-safe behaviours including:

- only entering the school site if feeling well
- wearing a face mask when requested
- frequently washing hands and using hand sanitiser
- maintaining a physical distance of 1.5 metres from others.

It is strongly recommended to be up-to-date with [COVID-19](#) and [influenza](#) vaccinations.

Stop, Drop and Go is preferred (dropping your child at the gate to limit adults on site) where appropriate.

Parents, carers and visitors must follow site access requirements and any Public Health directions.

## Encouraging family engagement

The need for schools to actively engage with families is recognised as highly important to student learning and wellbeing. Schools will progressively identify more ways to safely invite parents and carers into the school. Schools will continue to engage with families via other means where face-to-face is not possible or limited.

## Mixing of school groups

All schools are encouraged to limit unnecessary mixing between different classes and student groups where this is not required for learning or wellbeing purposes.

Schools are encouraged to limit unnecessary mixing between staff where this is not required for learning. Online and small group gatherings remain as options for bringing staff together.

When the mixing of groups is required to support educational outcomes, additional COVID-safe behaviours may be required to manage any associated risks.

## Assemblies and productions

Whole of school assemblies and productions can occur indoors or outdoors. To support COVID-safe behaviours, outdoor whole school assemblies, or indoor part-of-school assemblies, continue to be an option for schools.

COVID-safe measures must be in place including using well-ventilated spaces appropriate to the number of attendees, physical distancing where practical, and encouraging good hygiene.

While face masks are no longer mandatory, schools may identify situations, such as assemblies or productions, where face masks allow larger gatherings of staff, students and visitors to occur, while still supporting COVID-safe behaviours. Parents, carers and other visitors should wear masks if requested to by the school.

Staff and visitors are encouraged to wear a face mask indoors where they cannot physically distance and they should follow any other Public Health advice relative to the current COVID-19 risk in Tasmania.

## Principle 3 – No vulnerable child or child of an essential worker is turned away

The Government is coordinating efforts across agencies to ensure that all Tasmania's children and young people are safe, well and actively engaged in learning.

The Department of Education works closely with other agencies to support vulnerable students to access, participate and engage in their learning.

School Support and Wellbeing teams will continue to support the wellbeing of all students, with a particular focus on those students with diverse and complex needs requiring coordinated support.

It is a priority that school sites across all sectors remain open for vulnerable children and children of essential workers to attend. However, they should not attend if they are feeling unwell, have medical advice which states they are unable to return to school due to an ongoing medical condition, or they have been directed to stay home by Public Health.

Ongoing guidance and advice will be provided to schools based on Public Health advice.

## Principle 4 – Responses to be proportionate and health-risk based

The plan for has been developed based on experiences gained during 2022. Proportionate adjustments were made to the operational plan during Term 1 and 2 and will continue to be adjusted during the year in response to changes in community transmission, Public Health advice and emerging issues.

As changes to the plan occurs, these are communicated to stakeholders including students, parents, carers and school staff. Communication with students and families will come from their school. For Government schools, this will be supported by Department of Education advice and messages.

A COVID-19 Support Hotline, email and frequently asked questions have been established for Government school enquiries related to COVID-19. Catholic or Independent schools also have contact numbers for COVID-19 enquiries.

Approaches have been developed for a number of scenarios regarding disease prevalence in the community (low, medium and high), so that schools and ECEC services can be best prepared to adjust the plan should changes in Public Health advice indicate that is required.

### Rapid antigen tests

Students and staff will continue to have access to rapid antigen tests (RATs). Parents and carers can use a RAT if their child has COVID-19 symptoms or is a close contact.

All students have ongoing access to RATs through their school to ensure they always have some on hand in their home. Parents and carers should ensure that as their child uses the provided RATs that they seek replacements from their school at their earliest convenience. When there is an increase in cases within a school, Public Health may advise on more frequent use of RATs by students and staff. When this occurs, schools will provide these additional RATs and communicate to parents and carers on their intended use.

### Stay at home if unwell

Students, staff and visitors must stay home if unwell or if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

### Confirmed cases

There is a clear process in place to manage COVID-19 cases in schools. Similar to other illnesses, monitor your child closely for [symptoms](#). If your child is unwell, please keep them home and get them tested. Public Health will work closely with schools if there are increased cases in classrooms. Notifications to families regarding increases in cases will utilise existing communication channels used by schools.

Unless otherwise advised, the class will remain open for learning and students who are well should continue to attend.

The Department of Education has continued to support a number of students and young people with disability to continue to learn throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including making adjustments to learning and implementing medical action plans where appropriate. Students with disability with complex health needs will continue to be supported on an individual basis, working closely with parents and carers as necessary. This could include additional medical advice within the student's medical action plan.

## Principle 5 – Equip ECEC services and schools to respond on the basis of Public Health advice and with support from Public Health authorities where required

The Department of Education will support schools and services to revise their COVID plans, according to Public Health advice.

Staff, learners and their families will be provided with clear advice on what to do if they are considered a close contact in line with Public Health advice.

Rapid antigen tests will continue to be supplied to students with further supplies if recommended by Public Health to respond to an increase in COVID cases in schools.

Confirmed cases in schools and on sites will be managed in accordance with Public Health advice. If increases in COVID cases occurs Public Health will provide support to assist with the response. The Department of Education's COVID-19 Support team works closely with the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre to ensure the timely sharing of information and to provide schools with support and advice to respond to and manage COVID cases in schools.

Schools will communicate with Early Childhood Education and Care providers who operate on school sites to ensure a coordinated approach to managing confirmed cases, in accordance with Public Health advice.

## Principle 6 – Wellbeing of children and education staff to be supported

The wellbeing of learners in Government schools will be supported by:

- each school's Support and Wellbeing team monitoring students' wellbeing and determining the required supports to meet each student's individual needs
- the online *Wellbeing Check-in*, designed for students in Years 3 to 12, whether they are at school or learning from home
- the Department's Professional Support Staff teams, including school psychologists, social workers, speech and language pathologists and school nurses who will continue to provide both face-to-face and online support, for students learning on site and from home as required
- the Virtual Learning Centre where students and families will be able to access wellbeing resources.

Catholic and Independent school sectors also have in place approaches to support the wellbeing of their students and staff.

### Staff wellbeing and workload

The Department of Education provides clear guidance and supports for teaching and learning in different scenarios, with workload principles factored in (refer to Principle 1).

System level workforce planning has informed and supports school planning to ensure we can continue to keep learners safe and learning throughout COVID-related staff shortages.

The Department communicates clearly with staff on expectations, processes, planning and resources related to COVID-19, including the resources available to support student learning and wellbeing.

The Department will keep communicating the types of leave available to support all staff through COVID-related absences.

The Department actively promotes staff mental health and wellbeing, with supports available. This includes guidance and strategies to support principals and line managers in schools to hold staff wellbeing check-ins and conversations and make referrals to supports as needed.

All Department of Education staff have been provided with the opportunity to participate in a range of live online webinars focussing on different aspects of wellbeing.