

# Frequently asked questions for education settings – novel coronavirus (COVID-19)



Last updated 10 March 2020

## Exclusion advice – education settings

### What is the most current advice on excluding students/staff from education settings?

CECV advice is in accordance with national public health guidelines and current information from the Department of Education and Training (DET), Australian Chief Medical Officer and Victorian Chief Health Officer. For the most current advice, see:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/about/departments/Pages/coronavirus.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/departments/Pages/coronavirus.aspx).

The CECV works with the DET and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to ensure the most current and appropriate advice is provided to education settings regarding this outbreak.

### What if I have a child/student or staff member who has returned from mainland China from 1 February, Iran from 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March?

Parents/guardians/carers should ensure that any child/student returning from mainland China (not including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan) from 1 February, Iran from 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March 2020 is isolated at home and should not attend education settings for 14 days.

Any child/student returning from Italy must present for health screening at the borders as directed.

This recommendation does not apply retrospectively.

This same advice applies to any impacted staff.

### What if I have a student or staff member who is a confirmed case or contact of a confirmed case of novel coronavirus?

The existing advice remains that children/students are to be excluded from schools, childcare services, TAFEs, private training providers, universities and Learn Local organisations if the following applies:

- the person is a confirmed case of novel coronavirus
- the person is a close contact with a confirmed case of novel coronavirus in the past 14 days.

This same advice applies to any impacted staff.

*A close contact is someone who has been identified by health authorities as having at least 15 minutes face-to-face contact or sharing a closed space for more than two hours with a confirmed case.*

If you think a child/student or staff member may meet one of the above criteria, please call the DHHS to discuss further actions on 1300 651 160.

**Schools:** Please also inform your diocesan Catholic education office as soon as possible.

### **A staff member/student has been in contact with someone who has been in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, can they still attend their education setting?**

There is no need to self-isolate unless an individual has been identified by health authorities as a close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.

### **Is it safe for other children/students to attend education settings?**

Children/students who are well are expected to attend education settings as normal.

At the present time, because there is no evidence of transmission in the community in Victoria, people should continue to go about their business and do not need to take actions like limiting their movement in the community or staying at home.

The Australian Chief Medical Officer and Victorian Chief Health Officer's recommendations for education settings take a highly precautionary approach based on the latest and best medical advice.

## **Responding to confirmed and suspected cases**

### **A child/student/staff member at our education setting has been diagnosed with a confirmed case of coronavirus. What should I do?**

Please refer to the protocols sent by Special Message on Wednesday 11 March.

### **A child/student/staff member at our education setting is a close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus. Should I inform parents and staff?**

*A close contact is someone who has been identified by health authorities as having at least 15 minutes face-to-face contact or sharing a closed space for more than two hours with a confirmed case.*

If schools think a child/student or staff member is a confirmed case or a contact with a confirmed case, please follow the protocols provided by the CECV.

Schools should refrain from providing any communication or advice to students/staff/community until advised by the CECV or DHHS.

Schools are encouraged to cooperate with CECV or DHHS advice to protect their students and community.

### **A child/student/staff member at our education setting is being tested for coronavirus. Should I inform parents, students and staff?**

Unless advised by the DHHS or CECV, education settings should not advise their community of any testing being undertaken or reports of suspected cases.

Education settings are encouraged to cooperate with DHHS advice to protect their children/students and community.

Schools should refrain from providing any communication or advice to students/staff/community until advised by the CECV or DHHS.

### **Will I be notified if there is a confirmed case of coronavirus at my school?**

Relevant protocols, as advised by the DHHS, will be followed. The decision to inform the education setting and any members of the community will be made on a case-by-case basis in the interests of public safety, depending on whether there has been close contact by a confirmed case with any person(s) at the education setting.

In the event of a child/student or staff member being a close contact with a confirmed case of novel coronavirus, the DHHS will alert and discuss all necessary actions with the CECV and the school.

Schools with children/students/staff who are required to be excluded due to a confirmed case or close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus will receive notification from the DHHS.

Education settings are encouraged to cooperate with CECV and DHHS advice to protect their children/students and community.

Schools should refrain from providing any communication or advice to students/staff/community until advised by the CECV or DHHS.

## **Communication and engagement**

### **What do I do if a parent/guardian/carer is not aware of the advice from health authorities and a child/student arrives at an education setting who should be isolated at home?**

Inform the parent/guardian/carer/student (in the case of adult students) of the advice from health authorities and clarify whether they fall within the exclusion criteria. If yes, request that they take their child home/the student returns home.

Factsheets for parents/guardians/carers, including translated materials, are available at: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-education-sector-novel-coronavirus](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-education-sector-novel-coronavirus).

### **How should we engage parents/guardians/carers/students who are known to have travelled to mainland China from 1 February, Iran from 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March 2020 to ensure they are aware of the Chief Health Officer's advice?**

Education settings are asked to take reasonable steps to contact the families of any students who have travelled to mainland China from 1 February, Iran from 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March 2020 to ensure that they are aware of the most current advice of the Chief Health Officer.

Factsheets for parents/guardians/carers/students, including translated materials, are available at: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-education-sector-novel-coronavirus](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-education-sector-novel-coronavirus).

### **Where education settings are unsure if a child/student has travelled to mainland China from 1 February, Iran from 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March 2020, what action should be taken?**

Education settings must take all reasonable steps to advise all parents and students of the most current advice of the Chief Health Officer.

Factsheets for parents/guardians/carers/students, including translated materials, are available at: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-education-sector-novel-coronavirus](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/information-education-sector-novel-coronavirus).

## **What if a parent refuses to comply with the request and sends their child/children to school?**

1. Reassure the child/student if they are anxious.
2. Move the child/student to a single room away from others or, if not available/appropriate, an area well-removed from contact with others, being mindful of the child/student's wellbeing and safety. Identify a safe place for the child/student to be separated from others while also supervised, for example in an office with windows.
3. Contact parents/guardians/carers, inform them of the advice from health authorities and ask them to come and collect their child.
4. Attempt to understand the reasons for refusal to comply with the request and take reasonable steps to address the issues.
5. Contact your Regional Manager for support.

## **How should we advise parents who wish to keep their children at home, but have not travelled to mainland China from 1 February, Iran from 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March 2020?**

In line with the advice of the Chief Health Officer, there is no reason why those who have not travelled should not be attending school. The expectation is where children/students have not travelled to mainland China on or after 1 February, Iran on or after 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March 2020, they will attend education as usual.

At the present time, because there is no evidence of transmission in the community in Victoria, people should continue to go about their business and do not need to take actions like limiting their movement in the community or staying at home.

The Australian Chief Medical Officer and Victorian Chief Health Officer's recommendations for education settings take a highly precautionary approach based on the latest and best medical advice.

## **Isolation in education settings**

### **What do I do if a child/student attends an education setting who should be excluded?**

1. Reassure the child/student if they are anxious.
2. Move the child/student to a single room away from others or, if not available/appropriate, an area well-removed from contact with others, being mindful of the child/student's wellbeing and safety. Identify a safe place for the child/student to be separated from others while also supervised, for example in an office with windows.
3. Contact parents/guardians/carers, inform them of the advice from health authorities and ask them to come and collect their child.

### **If I need to isolate a child/student at an education setting, what steps should I take to ensure the health, wellbeing and safety of the child/student, myself and others?**

1. Be mindful of the child/student's wellbeing and reassure them if they are anxious.
2. Move the child/student to a single room away from others or, if not available/appropriate, an area well-removed from contact with others, being mindful of the child/student's wellbeing and safety. Identify a safe place for the child/student to be separated from others while also supervised, for example in an office with windows.
3. Contact parents/guardians/carers, inform them of the advice from health authorities and ask them to come and collect their child.
4. Follow DHHS guidance regarding safe hand and respiratory hygiene practices. The easiest way to protect yourself and your community is to pay attention to good hand and respiratory hygiene:

- a. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing (or cough into your elbow), dispose of the tissue into a bin and wash your hands afterwards. Wash your hands regularly, after using the toilet and before eating.
  - b. Familiarise yourself with infection prevention guidance under 'For the Victorian public' available at: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus).
5. If you have concerns about your health, please see your doctor.

## Isolation at home

### What advice is available for supporting children/students who are in home isolation?

If a child/student is in isolation at home due to coronavirus, the Australian Government Department of Health's [Information about Home Isolation](#) may be of assistance. The advice includes:

- how to monitor symptoms
- what to do if you feel unwell
- hygiene
- advice for others in the household
- keeping your spirits up
- where you can get more information.

Schools are encouraged to contact students to check on their welfare if they are unable to attend school. If a student is distressed, the issue should be referred to the education setting's wellbeing team, which can arrange for appropriate support.

### If someone is self-isolating at home but is not a confirmed case, do other people in the house need to isolate themselves?

There is no need for other members of the household to self-isolate, unless they have also travelled to mainland China on or after 1 February, Iran on or after 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March 2020, or have developed symptoms and are suspected to have novel coronavirus.

In line with the advice of the Chief Health Officer, those who are healthy and have not travelled to impacted areas should attend their education setting. The expectation is that children/students who have not travelled to mainland China, Iran or the Republic of Korea will continue to attend education as usual.

All members of the household should be encouraged to:

- WASH their hands often with soap and running water, for at least 20 seconds. DRY with paper towel or hand dryer.
- TRY not to touch their eyes, nose or mouth.
- COVER their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If they don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve or elbow.

### Should my student/staff member self-isolate until test results are received, when someone in their household is being tested for COVID-19?

Currently, there is no requirement to self-isolate unless an individual has been identified by health authorities as a close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19. There is no need to self-isolate while testing of a household member is occurring.

If the student/staff member is experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19, they should self-isolate and contact their GP.

All members of the household should be encouraged to:

- WASH their hands often with soap and running water, for at least 20 seconds. DRY with paper towel or hand dryer.
- TRY not to touch their eyes, nose or mouth.
- COVER their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If they don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve or elbow.

## Seeking medical assistance

### What if I have a child/student or staff member who is sick and has been in mainland China on or after 1 February, Iran on or after 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March 2020?

If a person who has been in mainland China on or after 1 February, **Iran on or after 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March** 2020 begins to feel unwell and develops shortness of breath, a cough or respiratory illness during the 14 days since they were last in mainland China, Iran or the Republic of Korea, they should seek medical attention. Call ahead to the GP or emergency department and mention their travel to mainland China, Iran or the Republic of Korea.

If the child/student or staff member has a cough, sore throat or shortness of breath:

- The child/student or staff member will need to be urgently excluded from the education setting and reviewed by a doctor.
- The child/student's parents/guardians/carers will need to be informed of the need to exclude their child for urgent medical review.

If the education setting is arranging transport for a child/student or staff member to a medical facility, call ahead to advise that there has been travel to mainland China (and whether this included travel to Hubei province), Iran or the Republic of Korea.

If the child/student or staff member has severe symptoms, such as shortness of breath:

- call 000 and request an ambulance
- advise the paramedics that there has been travel to mainland China (and whether this included travel to Hubei Province), Iran or the Republic of Korea.

### Unwell students and staff (schools)

In accordance with the DET's standard [Infectious Diseases Policy](#), send unwell students or staff home. Unwell students and staff should remain at home until symptoms resolve and seek medical assistance as required.

### Unwell children and staff (early childhood services)

In accordance with [Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services](#), send unwell children or staff home. Unwell children and staff should remain at home until symptoms resolve and seek medical assistance as required.

## Returning to education settings

### Do children/students and staff members require a medical certificate to return to education settings?

Unless otherwise instructed by the DHHS, **a medical certificate is not required to return to an education setting** for children/students and staff members without symptoms after 14 days who are requested not to attend as a precautionary measure. This includes children/students and staff members requested to stay at home after leaving mainland China, Iran or the Republic of Korea. **Schools should request a short note from parents/guardians/carers to explain the absence from school in the usual way.**

If a staff member or child/student has become unwell within 14 days of returning from mainland China, Iran or the Republic of Korea, or if they have been diagnosed with novel coronavirus, they will need to seek advice from the DHHS prior to returning to the education setting.

If a child/student or staff member has been informed by the DHHS they are a close contact of a confirmed case of novel coronavirus, irrespective of whether they have developed symptoms, they cannot attend education settings or events until receiving advice from the DHHS.

## Prevention

### Should staff be wearing protective clothing (face masks) when working?

Face masks are not recommended for use by members of the public in Victoria for the prevention of infections like novel coronavirus.

Follow DHHS guidance regarding safe hand and respiratory hygiene practices. The easiest way to protect yourself and your community is to pay attention to good hand and respiratory hygiene:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing (or cough into your elbow), dispose of the tissue into a bin and wash your hands afterwards. Wash your hands regularly, after using the toilet and before eating.
- Familiarise yourself with infection prevention guidance under 'For the Victorian public' available at: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus).
- If you have concerns about your health, please see your doctor.

### How can we help prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence.

Remind your staff, families and children that everyone can protect against infections by practising good hand and respiratory hygiene. Here are some tips that everyone at your school can follow:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing and sneezing (or cough into your elbow).
- Dispose of the tissue into a bin and wash your hands afterwards.
- Wash your hands regularly, after using the toilet and before eating.

Health promotion materials are available to distribute and promote to your staff, students and families, as follows:

- [Wash your hands regularly – poster](#)
- [Cover your cough and sneeze – poster](#)
- [Be a Soapy Hero!](#)

## Recording attendance

### How is the school to record the absence of students who remain at home in accordance with the DET's request?

Students who are absent due to this advice should be marked using Medical code, entering 'coronavirus' or 'COVID-19' in the comments field.

### Will this affect school enrolment data? Does the census date need to be considered?

No. Students who are enrolled but are absent using the 200 Medical code as a result of this advice will be counted as in attendance for the purposes of the census enrolment data (as long as they have not enrolled and attended another school up to and including census day). The key for the census submission process is that their enrolment status in CASES21 remains as an 'Active' student.

The use of the absence code 200 (Medical) is for a parent-approved absence and is subject to the principal approving it. Students who are absent from school due to concerns around coronavirus would be deemed to have approved absences for the period they are absent. Schools are required to have appropriate documentary evidence to support these approved absences, including proof of the provision of appropriate work for the student to complete if they are able to do so.

## Administration

### Do children/students and staff members require a medical certificate to return to schools or early childhood services?

See 'returning to education settings' above.

### How is the school to record the absence of students who remain at home in accordance with the DET's request?

See 'recording attendance' above.

## International travel and school excursions

Refer to the CECV Special Message issued on Friday 6 March 2020.

### Are staff-only trips cancelled?

Yes, unless they are going to New Zealand or Canada.

### Why are all overseas trips being cancelled (except to New Zealand and Canada) and not just trips to areas with known outbreaks of coronavirus?

We are acting on the advice of Victoria's Chief Health Officer and the relevant health authorities, as we have throughout the outbreak of novel coronavirus. The health and safety of our students and staff is always the top priority.

### Will parents be able to get their money back through insurance? What about school staff accompanying the students?

All schools are required to purchase travel insurance for overseas travel. Travel and associated insurance arrangements are made locally and therefore each school's insurance policy, provider and conditions may vary.



The CECV is working with the DET and schools to provide advice in relation to insurance and support them to make claims. As a first step, schools should contact their insurance provider and supply a copy of the updated DET advice regarding overseas travel to support a claim.

### **Is there a possibility that the trips will be rescheduled later in the year?**

We will continue to review health and travel advice in collaboration with health authorities and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as the situation evolves, and hope to be able to reschedule trips as soon as is practicable.

### **What is the timeframe for this? Could this be extended?**

We will continue to review health and travel advice in collaboration with Victoria's Chief Health Officer, relevant health authorities and the DFAT as the situation evolves, and will continue to keep our schools informed with the latest advice.

### **What about students who are going on family trips during school holidays? Will they be asked to self-isolate on their return?**

In line with current health advice, any child or student returning from mainland China (not including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan) from 1 February, Iran from 1 March or the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March is required to be isolated at home and should not attend school until 14 days after they were last in mainland China, Iran or the Republic of Korea.

Any child or student arriving from Italy must be presented for health screening at the borders as directed.

This same advice applies to any impacted staff.

Families are encouraged to regularly check the [Smartraveller](#) website.

### **Who do I contact for more information?**

For the latest information and advice, please refer to CECV Special Messages, CEVN or the DET coronavirus webpage: [www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx).

### **How do schools communicate this with their community?**

A template letter for schools to send to their parents/guardians/carers to inform them of this update has been provided: refer to CECV Special Message distributed on 11 March 2020.

## **General**

### **What can I do to keep my education setting safe?**

Education settings are encouraged to follow the directions provided by the CECV, the DET and Victorian health authorities.

The CECV issues advice that is in accordance with national public health guidelines and current information from the Australian Chief Medical Officer and Victorian Chief Health Officer. For the current advice, please refer to CECV Special Messages. Schools, educators/teachers and staff members should follow the advice of the experts when it comes to novel coronavirus.

### **Why has the advice changed?**

This is a rapidly changing situation.

The CECV receives advice from the DET, which issues advice that is in accordance with national public health guidelines and current information from the Australian Chief Medical Officer and Victorian Chief Health Officer. CECV advice is available from CEVN, with additional advice from the DET available at: [www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx).

The CECV will continue to work with the DET and the DHHS to ensure the most current and appropriate advice is provided to Catholic schools regarding this outbreak.

### **Is it safe to attend my education setting?**

The strong precautionary steps education settings are taking are based on the expert advice of Victoria's Chief Health Officer and Australia's Chief Medical Officer. All students should be attending school unless this is counter to the advice issued by the CECV, Victoria's Chief Health Officer or Australia's Chief Medical Officer.

### **Can my education setting proceed as normal with local activities such as camps and excursions?**

Yes. Local activities should proceed as normal.

## **International students**

### **How does this advice affect international students and the International Student Program?**

The CECV and the DET are working to support schools hosting students from China, Iran or the Republic of Korea, and the International Education Division is contacting each of these schools directly.

If you are an International Student Program school, work closely with your homestay families who are hosting international students from China, Iran or the Republic of Korea (or other areas where the virus has been reported) so that they understand the health advice and know to seek medical assistance where appropriate.

It is important that you closely monitor the wellbeing of international students, particularly from China, Iran and the Republic of Korea, who may feel vulnerable at this time, and connect them to support services as required.

For coronavirus FAQs, see the [ISP School Toolkit](#).

For information you may wish to provide to your homestay families, see: [For the Victorian public – coronavirus](#).

For specific questions, please email [international@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:international@edumail.vic.gov.au).

## Student support

### How can we support continuity of learning for students unable to attend education?

Education settings should support students who are unable to attend classes by providing educational materials that can be completed at home, or other flexible learning options where this is possible.

Schools with concerns regarding the impact of coronavirus on delivery of their learning programs are encouraged to contact the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) on (03) 9032 1700. The VCAA will work with individual schools to ensure that no student is disadvantaged.

There is no expectation for students who are unwell to study.

### How can we support wellbeing for students unable to attend education?

Contact should be made with students to check on their welfare while they are unable to attend education. If a student is distressed, the issue should be referred to the school's wellbeing team which can arrange for appropriate support to be provided.