COVID-19 ADVICE

FOR NSW INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Updated on 14 October 2022

See highlighting for latest updates

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INTRODUCTION

This document provides specific advice and guidance for NSW independent schools in a range of areas to assist in making informed operational decisions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In independent schools, operational decisions should comply with any Public Health Orders and other regulatory requirements, consider relevant Health advice and be based on a school's own risk assessment processes.

Key changes to NSW government restrictions in 2022 include:

- 23 February 2022 – easing of restrictions in schools were announced with schools encouraged to return to business as usual in a COVID-safe way by implementing risk assessment processes and risk mitigation strategies
- 22 April 2022 – changes to close contact isolation requirements took effect
- 13 May 2022 – the vaccination mandate for school staff ceased at midnight
- 12 July 2022 – NSW Health announced an escalation in community settings including a reduction in the COVID reinfection period from 12 weeks to just 4 weeks
- 9 September 2022 – reduction in isolation requirements for COVID-19 positive cases
- 21 September 2022 – all mask mandates for schools were removed
- 14 October 2022 – removal of isolation requirements for COVID-19 positive cases and closed contact requirements for people exposed to COVID-19.

This advice document has been updated to reflect each of these changes as they have occurred to support schools to review their risk assessments and risk mitigation strategies in response to these changes.

Whenever advice is updated within this document, principals will be notified of what specifically has changed so that access to current information is straightforward.

VACCINATIONS FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

What are the vaccination requirements for school staff?

Following the cessation of the NSW *Public Health (COVID-19 Vaccination of Education and Care Workers) Order 2022* on 13 May 2022 schools can lawfully permit unvaccinated staff to work at the school.

The NSW *Public Health (COVID-19 Care Services) Order 2022* was amended (effective 5 September 2022) removing the requirement for Assisted School Travel Program (ASTP) drivers and support officers (ATSOs) to have three doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccine. However, as the ASTP is provided by the NSW Department of Education, ASTP drivers and ATSOs fall under the Department's determination for staff requiring them to have a minimum of two doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccine. Independent schools are not responsible for verifying the vaccination status of ASTP drivers or ATSOs as the Department manages this under their contractual arrangements with these workers.

NDIS contractors are still required to have three doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccine. This requirement does not apply to other staff in schools working with students with disability.

From 18 July 2022, unvaccinated staff were permitted to work in Department of Education schools in NSW. The exception in Government schools is special school staff who the Department of Education requires to have received two vaccinations and a booster due to the known vulnerability of students in special schools. Independent special schools are not required to ensure that all staff are vaccinated. However, the risk to a vulnerable cohort should be factored into risk management strategies in place in special schools.

Further advice for schools can be found on the AISNSW COVID-19 Workplace Management webpage.

Is vaccination compulsory for students?

There is no vaccination mandate for students.

RAHT TESTING

Do students and staff have to test for COVID-19?

From 14 October 2022, testing for COVID-19 is no longer required, however, NSW Health strongly recommends that people should do a COVID-19 test if they have COVID-19 symptoms or have had a high or moderate risk exposure to someone with COVID-19. NSW Health advises that It is especially important that people at higher risk of severe illness get tested so they can access early treatment, including antiviral medicines.

Further information about testing, including who is at higher risk of severe illness is available at the NSW Health fact sheet on 'What COVID-19 test should I do?'.

RAHT testing for schools

As part of the NSW Government's focus on prioritising face-to-face learning in schools, the NSW Government through the NSW Department of Education provided rapid antigen home test (RAHT) kits to all schools in NSW to be used for surveillance testing by staff and students as well as incident response at the commencement of Term 1, 2022.

On 19 February 2022, the NSW Premier and Minister for Education announced a move from surveillance testing in schools to 'symptomatic testing'. In Terms 1-3, 2022, the NSW Government provided supplies of RAHT kits to all NSW schools for symptomatic testing.

In addition to previous deliveries of RAHT kits to schools, independent schools continue to be able to order additional RAHT kits (as well as disposable masks), where needed, through a COVID-19 supplies COS account set up for the school by the NSW Department of Education. RAHT kits and masks ordered through the school's dedicated COVID-19 supplies COS account will be at no cost to the school. Details about how to order additional COVID supplies is available here.

RAHT testing for special schools

Click here for information about use of RAHT kits in special schools.

RAHT testing for approved early childhood services

Click here for information about use of RAHT kits in approved early childhood services.

What kind of RAHT kits will schools receive?

Based on availability, kits sent to schools may be nasal swabs or saliva testing kits. Special schools have been prioritised for receiving saliva kits.

Principals who receive a combination of nasal swabs and saliva testing kits should use their discretion to distribute the test kits across their student and staff cohorts, relative to their local settings. For example, saliva test kits could be prioritised for students with sensory needs or the younger year groups in a primary school.

All RAHT kits contain instructions on how to use the tests, check results and dispose of the tests safely. Parents, carers and staff can also download user guides of the relevant test they have received through the Therapeutic Goods Administration website. The user guides contain a

contact number for the suppliers for additional support. People using saliva testing kits must not eat or drink for 30 minutes before taking the saliva RAHT, to give more accurate results.

How can schools access additional RAHT kits and/or masks?

Schools can continue to order additional tests and/or masks for staff or students through their COVID-19 COS account if required.

In addition to the additional supply referred to above, schools who opted in, should now have access to a dedicated COVID-19 supplies COS account set up for the school by the Department of Education and so can order additional RAHT kits if required. to enable them to order additional RAHT kits for symptomatic testing (and masks) where needed. RAHT kits ordered through the school's dedicated COVID-19 supplies COS account will be at no cost to the school.

Following are the product codes schools should use to order COVID supplies at no cost through their dedicated COS account:

- Masks:
    – Adult Face Masks – DOE0134
    – Child Face Masks – DOE0137

- Rapid Antigen Tests in a variety of pack sizes:
    – DOE0131, DOE0135, DOE0136, DOE0139, DOE0141, DOE0142.

There are order limits of one RAHT multi-pack per student and staff member in schools. For special schools, the order limit is two RAHT multi-packs per student and staff member. Based on availability, RAHT kits sent to schools may be nasal swabs or saliva testing kits, and will come in multipacks of either 5 or 7 tests.

How does the school distribute the RAHT kits to students and staff?

Schools are responsible for determining the best way of distributing RAHT kits to students and staff within their school.

Schools are not expected to keep a record of who is provided with a RAHT kit but may choose to do so.

What is the process for RAHT testing? Do people test at home?

The RAHT kits that have been provided are a quick and easy screening tool to help detect COVID-19 in people who do not have symptoms. They involve a simple nose swab that is placed in a chemical solution.

Schools will not be required to administer RAHT tests to students. Parents/carers of children participating in RAHT testing will be required to administer the RAHT test at home.

Provided within the RAHT kits are instructions on how to use the tests, check the results and how to dispose of the tests safely. Parents, carers and staff can also download the user guides of the relevant test that they received through the Therapeutic Goods Administration website. The user guides will also contain a contact number for the suppliers for additional support.

If parents and carers need an interpreter to help with their questions, they can be provided with the following details:

> 'If you need an interpreter to assist with the enquiry, please call the Telephone Interpreter Service on 131 450 and ask for an interpreter in your language. Tell the operator the

phone number you want to call and the operator will get an interpreter on the line to assist you with the conversation. You will not be charged for this service.'

Do independent schools need to record positive results? What about negative results?

On 14 October 2022, the NSW Public Health Order was amended to no longer require people to report a positive RAHT. However, people will still be able to voluntarily register RAHT tests via the Service NSW App.

NSW Health recommends that anyone who tests positive to COVID-19 continues to report their positive RAHT result to Service NSW to help them access medical support from NSW Health, including antiviral medicines for people at higher risk of severe illness. Although staff and students are also no longer required to notify the school of any positive result to a COVID test, NSW Health recommends that anyone who has tested positive to COVID-19 tells people they spend a lot of time with and their employer. So it is recommended that students and staff notify the school if they test positive to COVID-19.

Independent schools may set their own requirements for students and staff to notify the school if they test positive to COVID-19 test. Notifications to the school will help to inform the school's risk assessment process. The NSW Department of Education has indicated that it will continue to require students and staff in government schools to notify the school if they test positive to COVID-19.

Further information about testing, including who is at higher risk of severe illness is available at the NSW Health website on Registering a positive rapid antigen test result.

Will students need their own Service NSW account?

No, students will not be required to have a Service NSW account. Parents/carers will be able to voluntarily notify Service NSW of their child's positive result.

The Service NSW app/portal enables notifications of positive results to also indicate a student's school.

Who does a student or staff member that lives interstate need to report their positive test to?

If a student or staff member at your school tests positive to COVID-19 through a RAHT and does not live in NSW, they must follow their state or territory's local requirements about registering positive RAHT results as relevant, it is also recommended that they notify the school as soon as possible.

Following are links to current reporting requirements for ACT, Queensland and Victorian residents:

- **ACT** - ACT Government's RAT positive result registration form
- **Queensland** –Queensland Government's RAT positive result registration form
- **Victoria** –Victorian Government's reporting your result.

MANAGING POSITIVE COVID-19 CASES

The Public Health (COVID-19 Self-Isolation) Order was updated on 14 October 2022 to remove COVID-19 isolation requirements in NSW. From this date there are no longer any isolation or other mandatory requirements for people who have tested positive to COVID-19 or for household/close contacts. NSW Health continues to provide health advice for:

- people who have tested positive to COVID-19

- people exposed to COVID-19.

NSW Health advises that a person who has COVID-19 may be infectious for up to 10 days but are most infectious in the two days before symptoms start and while they have acute symptoms such as runny nose, sore throat, cough and fever.

NSW Health have advised that organisations will be expected to set out entry requirements relating to masks and manage the return to work of COVID cases under a work, health and safety framework. Further information from NSW Health is available at the NSW Health website on Guidance for businesses.

Independent schools are responsible for completing their own risk assessments with consideration of advice from NSW Health. Independent schools can continue to determine their own school-based requirements for managing COVID-19 within the school community based on the school's own risk assessments.

NSW Health also provides general advice for parents, students and children about staying OCVID safe in schools.

What does a student or staff member do if they test positive?

On 14 October 2022, the requirement for people who have tested positive to COVID-19 in NSW to isolate was removed from the Public Health Order. If a person tested positive to COVID-19 prior to this date and are part way through their isolation period, they will be released from isolation on 14 October 2022. NSW Health strongly recommends that students and staff do not attend school if they have acute symptoms for COVID-19 or other respiratory illnesses.

From 14 October 2022, it is also no longer a requirement under the Public Health Order for staff or students to report a positive RAHT test to Service NSW or notify schools if they have tested positive. Schools may still require staff and students to notify the school if they test positive to COVID-19 to inform the school's risk assessment process.

The NSW Department of Education has indicated that it will continue to:

- request students in government schools notify their school if they test positive to COVID-19

- require staff notify their principal if they test positive to COVID-19.

Independent schools are responsible for completing their own risk assessments and school-based requirements for students and staff who have tested positive to COVID-19 which may include:

- requiring students and staff to report their positive COVID-19 test results to the school

- requesting that students and/or staff not attend school while they have symptoms, or for a period of time after testing positive as determined by the school based on the school's risk assessment

- implementing additional risk mitigation strategies (such as wearing mask) upon return to school for a period of time as determined by the school.

NSW Health strongly recommends that any student or staff member who tests positive to COVID-19 follow the advice outlined in the NSW Health Testing Positive to COVID-19 Fact Sheet which recommends that they:

- stay home until acute symptoms have gone

- don't visit people at high risk of severe illness, anyone in hospital or an aged or disability care facility for at least 7 days

- wear a mask when indoors and on public transport, if they must leave home

- avoid large gatherings and indoor crowded places

- talk to the school about when they should return to school

- tell people that they live with, or spend a lot of time with (such as the school), that they have COVID-19

- try to separate from people they live with as much as possible

- register their positive rapid antigen test result with Service NSW.

When can a student or staff member return to school after testing positive?

Following the removal of isolation requirements for people who have tested positive to COVID-19 in NSW from the Public Health Order on 14 October 2022, independent schools can determine their own school-based requirements for students and staff who have tested positive to COVID-19, including when a student or staff member may return to school.

Students and staff members who have previously tested positive to COVID-19 and are part way through their isolation period will be released from isolation at the beginning of 14 October 2022.

The NSW Department of Education has indicated that it will continue to require students and staff in government schools to stay at home if they test positive to COVID-19 until they are symptom free.

NSW Health recommends that people who have tested positive to COVID-19 stay away from high-risk setting such as health, disability and aged care for 7 days and until they have no symptoms to help protect others. Further information from NSW Health is available at the NSW Health website on Guidance for businesses.

Does the school need to notify the school community if a student or staff member tests positive?

Schools may determine if and when they notify the school community about cases in the school based on their local context and number of cases within the school community. The NSW Department of Education has indicated that it will continue to send regular communications to school communities when there are cases in the school community reminding the community to monitor for symptoms and get tested if they have any symptoms.

NSW Health recommends that organisations continue to inform people with the organisation of the general situation in relation to positive cases within the organisation, noting that the privacy and confidentiality of the person who tested positive for COVID-19 must always be maintained. Further information from NSW Health is available at the NSW Health website on Guidance for businesses.

Schools may use this communication template (*click on the button to download the template)* to alert the school community as needed that there has been a case and to monitor for symptoms. This communication does not need to be personalised and can be distributed to staff and families for either a class, cohort or whole school group as appropriate to the situation. Schools have the discretion to make this decision depending on the contact the person who has tested positive had in the two days prior to being symptomatic or testing positive. Refer to the section on overnight excursions for a sample communication template for notifying students of a positive case in their room/cabin whilst on camp.

Click here for **General Communication template**

(This link will download a word document to your machine)

Under the NSW Health Records Act the identity of the person who has been diagnosed can only be discussed with the minimum number of people needed to assist with identifying contacts and cannot be shared with anyone else. An individual can disclose their positive result, however the school should not comment due to the Health Records Act and privacy legislation.

Are schools obligated to notify SafeWork NSW if we have a confirmed COVID-19 case at School?

SafeWork NSW state on their website that they expect businesses to report any hospitalisation (where treatment as an in-patient in a hospital is required) and any fatality, where a worker contracted, or is likely to have contracted, COVID-19 in the workplace. SafeWork NSW have a reporting portal available through their website.

Are schools obligated to notify our Workers Compensation insurer if we have a confirmed COVID-19 case at School?

We recommend that schools contact their workers compensation insurer to understand their obligations. The NSW Government State Insurance Regulatory Authority website states that as an employer, you must notify your workers compensation insurer of any workplace injury or illness within 48 hours, which includes COVID-19 infection.

Currently, there is a presumption in place that workers in schools will automatically be presumed to have contracted COVID-19 at the workplace. More information about this is available on the NSW Government State Insurance Regulatory Authority website.

What support is available if the school has Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students that has testing positive?

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities may be at greater risk of vulnerability to serious illness from COVID-19 infection, schools are requested to notify the AISNSW COVID-19 support team in the following situations:

- where a school has a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled and there are multiple positive cases within the school community
- where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have tested positive and may be returning to country.

This will enable AISNSW to facilitate liaison with NSW Health as appropriate for further advice as AISNSW can notify the NSW Health Public Health Response Branch (PHRB) of the situation and management steps that the school has implemented and request additional public health advice, if required. The PHRB has a central coordination role and can notify the Centre for Aboriginal

Health, Aboriginal health services and the local Public Health Unit (PHU), as relevant, for their awareness and to provide additional advice to support the school's response where requested.

Independent schools are also able to directly contact their local Public Health Unit for risk assessment advice and support should they be managing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who have tested positive.

What are the requirements for household/close contacts?

Changes to the Public Health Order on 14 October 2022 removed any requirements for household/close contacts of people who have tested positive to COVID-19.

Independent schools are responsible for completing their own risk assessments may determine their own school-based requirements for students, staff and visitors who have been in contact with someone who has tested positive to COVID-19, for example notifying the school and implementing additional risk mitigation strategies (such as wearing mask) while attending the school for a period of time as determined by the school.

NSW Health strongly recommends that any person who has been in contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 follow the advice outlined in the NSW Health Advice for people exposed to COVID-19 Fact Sheet which recommends they assess their risk of exposure and take actions to reduce the risk of spreading it to others.

HSW Health identifies the risk of contracting COVID-19 is high if a person lives with, interacted closely with, or spent a long time with someone who has tested positive.

HSW Health identifies the risk of contracting COVID-19 as moderate if a person spent some time with someone who has tested positive.

NSW Health recommends that anyone who is at high or moderate risk of contracting COVID-19 take precautions, including but not limited to:

- monitoring for symptoms any if any cold or flu symptoms (runny nose, sore throat, cough, fever) develop, stay home and get tested for COVID-19. If the test result is positive, follow the testing positive to COVID-19 and managing COVID-19 safely at home advice. If the test result is negative, stay home until symptoms have gone

- avoiding visiting high-risk settings such as a hospital, aged or disability care facilities, or visiting people at high risk of severe illness for at least 7 days. If they have to visit one of these settings, have a rapid antigen test before they go

- talking to their employer about when they should return to the workplace, this is particularly important for people who work in a high risk setting such as health, disability and aged care

- wearing a mask when in an indoor setting that is not their own home and on public transport.

Regardless of level of risk, NSW Health recommends that anyone who has come into contact with someone who has tested positive to COVID-19 to monitor for symptoms and get tested if symptoms develop.

If an employee is self-isolating due to testing positive to COVID-19, what type of leave should they take?

Changes to the Public Health Order on 14 October 2022 removed any requirements for people who have tested positive to COVID-19 to isolate. Independent schools are responsible for

completing their own risk assessments may determine their own policy and school-based requirements for staff who have tested positive to COVID-19 which may include asking the staff member to not attend school for a period of time as determined by the school.

If the staff member is unwell due to COVID they are entitled to access their personal leave.

If the employee is well and able to work but the school has requested that they not attend the school site, they may work from home. This may be difficult for teachers. If there is no work that the staff member can perform from home during isolation the school must pay the teacher normal salary while they are isolating as the school is requiring the teacher to stay away from work as a risk management strategy. The absence from work should not be deducted from personal leave unless the employee is ill and unable to work.

If an employee needs to look after a family member who has COVID-19 or is isolating, is this carer's leave?

If the family member is ill and requires care, personal carers leave may be accessed. To check if personal carers leave is applicable in the circumstances contact the Workplace Management Team intake line on 02 9299 2845.

What evidence should an employee provide who has contracted COVID-19 and wishes to take sick leave?

Our MEAs set out when evidence may be required for supporting a claim of personal (sick) leave. Generally, the employee, if required by the school, must provide evidence that would satisfy a reasonable person that the personal (sick) leave is being taken due to illness arising from COVID-19. Given the difficulty of attending a doctor in person, schools may consider accepting evidence such as photographic evidence of a Rapid Antigen Test and/or a PCR test result text message.

MASKS

Are masks mandatory on school sites?

On Wednesday 23 February 2022, the Premier announced changes to the requirements for masks in schools:

- from Monday 28 February, masks were no longer mandatory for staff or students in secondary schools/classes.
- from Monday 7 March, masks were no longer mandatory for staff in primary schools/classes or in early childhood services.

In line with community settings, workers who support students with disability in special schools, support classes and some mainstream classrooms may still be required to wear masks while working with students. Further advice in relation to this is outlined below.

If staff and students who have positive to COVID-19 are not isolating, NSW Health strongly recommends that they wear a mask when indoors and on public transport. While masks are no longer mandated, staff and students may continue to choose to wear a mask.

Schools may also still choose to request that masks be worn as a risk mitigation strategy within the school in response its own risk assessment processes.

What about masks for non-teaching staff, or visitors to site?

The changes to mask requirements announced on 23 February 2022, in primary and secondary school settings applies for <u>all</u> staff, not just teaching staff and for visitors to the school, including parents and carers.

What are the mask requirements for staff working with students with disability?

There may be staff, including disability support workers, in some school settings who should continue to wear masks when working with students with disability who may be at greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19 infection due to underlying medical conditions, and where staff may have close contact with students due to the additional needs of the students, leading to a greater potential for transmission in these settings.

Workers who would be considered disability support workers in the education sector are those who provide the following:

- NDIS services
- Assisted Student Transport Program services – drivers and Assisted Travel Support Officers
- education and/or support of a student with disability in a Special School or special support class within a mainstream setting where the student is dependent on the worker for mobility, health care, personal care, or constant supervision to minimise harm.
- education and/or support of a student with disability in a mainstream setting where the student is dependent on the worker for mobility, health care, personal care, or constant supervision to minimise harm.

Although not a requirement, independent schools may consider implementing masks as a risk mitigation strategy for staff working with students with disability. The NSW Department of Education has indicated that it will continue to require disability support staff in government schools to wear masks when working directly with those students.

If a school continues to use masks as a risk mitigation strategy, what types of masks should they use?

NSW Health continues to encourage the community to wear masks where social distancing is not possible. Schools may choose to request that masks be worn as a risk mitigation strategy within the school in response its own risk assessment processes.

If schools choose to implement mask wearing as a risk mitigation strategy, there are no requirements about which types of masks are used, however there may be particular circumstances where some masks are preferable over others (e.g. N95 masks provide a greater level of protection if a staff member is caring for a positive case in a boarding facility).

For vulnerable individuals, their clinician may recommend particular masks as a part of their healthcare plan.

Are masks still required in an office?

From 28 February 2022, masks were no longer required to be worn by any school staff unless it is the school's policy to do so or if the individual is required to do so as a household/close contact.

Are students required to wear masks on public transport/ school buses?

The NSW Government has announced that masks will no longer be mandatory on public transport from Wednesday 21 September 2022.

The requirement for people to wear masks on public transport has been removed, including taxis and rideshare services, in transport waiting areas and the indoor areas of cruise terminals.

Can schools access a supply of masks at no cost?

Schools can continue to order additional tests and/or masks for staff or students through their COVID-19 COS account if required.

Schools who opted in, should now have access to their dedicated COVID-19 supplies COS account set up for the school by the Department of Education and so can order masks if required

The school's dedicated COS account for COVID-19 supplies is separate to any existing COS account that the school may have and enables the government to cover the cost of any masks and RAHT kits ordered rather than the school being charged.

Following are the product codes schools should use to order COVID supplies at no cost through their dedicated COS account:

- Masks:
  – Adult Face Masks – DOE0134
  – Child Face Masks – DOE0137

- Rapid Antigen Tests in a variety of pack sizes:
  – DOE0131, DOE0135, DOE0136, DOE0139, DOE0141, DOE0142.

There will be order limits of one mask per student and two masks per staff member per week.

RISK ASSESSMENT FOR SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

From 28 February 2022, restrictions on school activities were removed including schools no longer needing implement cohorting of students as a risk mitigant, although schools may continue to choose to do so.

From this date schools were encouraged to proceed with their usual activities and events taking into consideration COVID smart risk mitigation as relevant.

Schools continue to be able to choose to re-introduce and relax additional COVID-smart measures for periods of time as determined by the school. Schools may choose to reintroduce risk mitigation measures to minimise disruption to face-to-face learning, reduce possible in-school transmission of COVID-19 and promote health and safety for a short period of time to minimise risk, or to act as a "circuit breaker" in order to reduce cases and avoid the need to revert to learning from home. Examples of additional measures may include the re-introduction of:

- mask wearing for staff and visitors
- mask wearing for students
- rescheduling large indoor gatherings (such as indoor assemblies)
- postponing non-essential activities (such as camps).

Schools may also consider moving individual classes/cohorts or the whole school to learning from home for a period of time where the prevalence of COVID cases in the school community are impacting of the school's capacity to continue to provide face-to-face learning. Additional advice about staff shortages is found here.

Schools can determine the appropriate period of time for the implementation of additional measures based on the school's own context and prevalence of COVID-19 cases within the school and broader community. Where additional measures are being introduced as a 'circuit breaker' in order to reduce cases, generally a period of one week (five school days) provides time for the measures to take effect, with the situation able to be re-assessed at that point.

Schools may also refer to NSW Health advice for parents, students and children about staying OCVID safe in schools.

What risk assessment processes do schools need to consider in planning activities for staff, students and the broader community in the context of COVID-19?

NSW independent schools are well practiced at assessing risk as part of their day-to-day operations and it is likely that most schools will already have risk assessment tools and templates.

From a COVID-19 perspective, operational decisions should comply with any relevant Public Health Order, consider relevant Health advice and be based on a school's own risk assessment processes.

There are no restrictions on school activities with schools planning activities in a COVID-safe way by implementing school-based risk assessment processes and risk mitigation to enable continuity of education and to support well-being.

Independent schools have the autonomy to make their own operational decisions balancing risk and safety measures to enable continuity of education and to support well-being.

If a school chooses to run a specific activity, then additional COVID safe planning based on the school's own risk assessment should be considered to mitigate risk. Schools should also consider mechanisms for parents/carers to be able to make informed decisions and provide consent that acknowledges the risk for their child's participation in student focused activities.

There is **no requirement for a school to develop a separate COVID-19 risk assessment** for events, activities or business as usual operations. Rather, adding a COVID-19 risk mitigation lens to existing risk assessments is likely to be most effective.

What risk assessment tools and templates are available to support independent schools?

Whilst it is likely that most schools will already have risk assessment tools and templates that serve them well, AISNSW has developed a risk assessment template which might be useful (*click on the button to download the template*).

Click here for
Risk assessment template

(This link will download a word document to your machine)

It may also be useful to refer to the NSW Government's General COVID-19 Safety Planning tool which is available here.

What are the main COVID-19 risk mitigation strategies for schools?

The main strategies to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission are generally well understood and can be applied to any activity. They include:

- vaccination
- masks
- hygiene
- physical distancing
- ventilation.

What do schools need to consider when planning specific activities or events?

The following considerations for specific activities may be useful to refer to when reviewing, developing, or refining risk assessments for your school, noting that there are no mandated risk mitigation strategies:

Visitors

If visitors are on-site or interacting with students schools may wish to consider:

- reinforcing NSW Health messaging to stay home and get a test if showing COVID-19 symptoms
- ways to reduce mixing and mingling of staff and student cohorts with visitors
- reviewing current vaccination requirements
- requesting visitors wear masks indoors.

Whole school and inter-school gatherings (including assemblies, year meetings)

If bringing together large groups or multiple cohorts schools may wish to consider:

- choosing well-ventilated or outdoor venues
- requesting masks are worn indoors if physical distancing isn't possible and contact is sustained
- providing hygiene supplies (such as sanitiser) and encourage use.

Events

When organising events schools may wish to consider:

- well-ventilated or outdoor venues
- maximising ventilation in indoor venues
- providing additional sanitising stations and enhance cleaning of high-touch areas
- requesting masks are worn indoors if physical distancing isn't possible and contact is sustained.

Excursions

When organising excursions schools may wish to consider:

- well-ventilated or outdoor venues
- maximising ventilation in indoor venues COVID-safety measures offered by venues and providers, including staff vaccination mandates and hygiene supplies
- preventing anyone displaying COVID-19 symptoms from attending.

If planning an overnight excursion or camp, it may be useful to also refer to the overnight and residential-like settings and transport and travel advice.

Transport and travel

If travelling with a group of students, schools may wish to consider:

- prioritising private use transport (such as chartered coaches) or walking to reduce mingling with the general public
- encouraging masks on public transport and aircraft (plus associated waiting areas) where the students and staff can't physically distance from others.

Overnight and residential-like settings

When planning for a group of students and staff to stay overnight (such as camp) schools may wish to consider:

- using a cohort-based approach (such as a Year 7 only camp) where appropriate
- plan for if a staff member or student becomes unwell at camp, including:
    - confirming the responsibilities of the school, the provider and parents and carers in caring for anyone who develops symptoms while on camp (including transport and COVID-19 testing) and for those who have shared a bedroom/cabin with them
    - considering arrangements for the temporary isolation of students or staff that are displaying symptoms and/or test positive on a RAHT while making arrangements for them to return home
- informing participants and their families of through permission notes/consent forms of the following:
    - anyone who is unwell (including with mild COVID-19 symptoms) should not attend. It is recommended that this information be included on all permission/information notes
    - the higher likelihood for secondary cases if there is an exposure
    - ensuring consent forms include COVID-19 response protocols and parents/carers' involvement in caring for students who develop symptoms
    - for interstate or overseas-based camps/excursions, note that COVID requirements and restrictions, if any, may differ between states and countries. The current requirements of the relevant state/country should be reviewed and communicated to staff, parents and carers as part of the interstate/overseas

==excursion planning process, noting that requirements may be subject to change without notice.==

- encouraging rapid antigen testing before departure to reduce the likelihood of anyone testing positive at camp
- maintaining records of participation details of groups in residential facilities (each cabin or room)
- whether students can be COVID-19 tested while at camp. If students are using rapid antigen testing, ensure appropriate consent has been granted, and supervision measures are in place to support duty of care and wellbeing
- requesting students and staff to wear masks indoors, including in common residential areas where social distancing is not possible, but excluding sleeping areas
- ==if there is a case at a school camp or overnight excursion consider:==
    - ==isolating the case temporarily while making arrangements for them to return home==
    - ==reviewing residential facility records (such as cabins or rooms) and identify higher-risk contacts==
    - ==COVID-19 testing of higher-risk contacts (with appropriate parent/carer consent)==
    - ==contacting parents/carers to collect confirmed cases.==

==With the removal of mandatory isolation requirements, independent schools should consider whether they will allow students or staff who have tested positive or have had contact with someone who has tested positive to attend overnight excursions/camps.==

If planning an overnight excursion or camp, it may be useful to refer to the excursion and transport and travel advice.

Work placements

==In line with NSW Health advice, it is recommended that apprentices, trainees, students on placement or staff members who have tested positive to COVID-19 or who are at high or moderate risk of contracting COVID-19 not attend settings identified as high risk by NSW Health (e.g. healthcare, aged care or disability care facilities).==

Dancing

When organising activities involving dancing schools may wish to consider:

- well-ventilated or outdoor venues where possible
- maximising ventilation in indoor venues the use of masks if physical distancing is not possible and contact is sustained, such as where dancing in partners

Instruments

If playing musical instruments schools may wish to consider:

- well-ventilated or outdoor venues where possible
- maximising ventilation in indoor venues avoiding sharing instruments
- where possible, requesting students bring their own instruments
- not sharing instruments played with the mouth, even with enhanced cleaning
- bell covers (trumpets, clarinets, saxophones, etc.) to reduce the spread of droplets/aerosols
- the use of masks if physical distancing is not possible and contact is sustained.

Singing

If singing schools may wish to consider:

- well-ventilated or outdoor venues where possible
- maximising ventilation in indoor venues

- the use of masks if physical distancing is not possible and contact is sustained.

External placements (including apprenticeships and traineeships)

When organising external placements schools may wish to consider:

- COVID-safety measures offered by providers, including staff vaccination mandates, ventilation and hygiene supplies
- confirming whether students participating in placements are affected by industry specific vaccination mandates or mask requirements
- where masks are not mandated, encouraging students to wear a mask where appropriate.

Drama

When organising activities involving drama schools may wish to consider:

- well-ventilated or outdoor venues where possible.
- maximising ventilation in indoor venues
- the use of masks if physical distancing is not possible and contact is sustained, such as working with partners or groups.

Sports

When organising sports activities schools may wish to consider:

- well-ventilated or outdoor venues where possible
- maximising ventilation in indoor venues
- the use of masks indoors if physical distancing is not possible and contact is sustained
- encouraging participants to bring their own equipment (particularly water bottles, towels and clothing) where possible
- modifying activities to reduce contact or increase physical distancing
- reducing the use of changing rooms by asking students to come ready to participate
- where equipment is being shared, increased cleaning and hygiene control measures (such as sanitising bats and balls between plays or games).

School based exams

When organising exams schools may wish to consider:

- well-ventilated venues
- scheduling exams across multiple spaces to maximise ventilation
- planning alternative venues and prepare/train additional staff in case of disruption
- reminding students to stay home and get a test if showing any symptoms of illness
- providing advice to students on the evidence of illness/misadventure required (such as COVID-19 test results for positive cases or a doctor's certificate for symptoms of illness)
-
- online and alternative assessment options where needed.

Parent and carer consent

- when seeking parent or carer's consent for students' participation in extra-curricular, out of school hours or off-site activities the following wording may be helpful:

I acknowledge that this event will be held in accordance with any current NSW Health COVID-19 Public Health Orders and in accordance with school policies and procedures. I acknowledge and accept that there is a risk that my child may be exposed to COVID-19 whilst attending and participating at this event. I confirm that my child will not attend if displaying any symptoms of illness, and/or directed to isolate under public health orders.

- further information from NSW Health on the risk of exposure is available at the [NSW Health People exposed to COVID-19 fact sheet](#).

2022 HSC EXAMINATIONS

NESA's COVID-smart protocols for HSC practical, performance and languages oral exams

NESA has published COVID-smart protocols for HSC practical, performance and languages oral exams which were developed in consultation with NSW Health to support the health and safety of staff and students and to minimise the potential for disruptions to these exams.

An overview of the protocols is available at NESA's COVID-smart protocols page. Principals can also access a more comprehensive version of the protocols by logging into Schools Online.

Illness/Misadventure appeals for HSC students affected by COVID-19

On 11 October 2022, NESA published updated advice about Illness/Misadventure appeals for HSC students affected by COVID-19 during the 2022 HSC written examinations. NESA's advice can be found here.

For students who test positive to COVID-19 during the exam period, they will be able to continue to use a registered RAHT or PCR test as evidence for an Illness/Misadventure appeal for a period of up to 7 days from the date they test positive for the duration of the HSC exam period.

This provides reassurance to HSC students who have tested positive to COVID-19 that they may choose to isolate at home and not attend their HSC exams for a period of up to 7 days before they need additional medical evidence to support an Illness/Misadventure appeal.

The key message for HSC students is that they are strongly encouraged to stay home if they are unwell, however, students will not be prevented from attending their exams if they choose to do so.

RAHT supplies for HSC students

AISNSW understands that the NSW Department of Education is making arrangements for Year 12 students to access additional RAHT tests. Should schools receive an extra delivery of RAHT kits at the start of Term 4 2022, they should be made available to Year 12 students so they can self-test during the exam period as needed. Schools may also draw on their existing supplies for this purpose.

Independent schools can continue to order additional RAHT kits and masks for all staff and students through their COVID-19 COS account as needed. Further information about ordering additional COVID-19 supplies is available here.

REDUCING THE RISK OF ILLNESS WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

All students, staff and their families should follow NSW Health's advice to reduce the risk of not only COVID-19, but also other illnesses that may affect school communities such as the flu. Schools may reinforce the following NSW Health messages with their communities:

- stay home if unwell
- keep up to date with vaccinations – including the flu vaccine, which is available from your local GP, pharmacy or Aboriginal Medical Service. Flu vaccines are free for all children aged 6 months to under 5 years, or for a small charge for those aged 5 years and older
- get tested immediately for COVID-19 if you become symptomatic
- practice good hand hygiene by washing regularly with soap and water
- take a RAHT before visiting vulnerable loved ones or going to large gatherings and events.

STAFF ACTIVITIES

There are no restrictions on school activities for staff, for example:

- use of staff rooms and communal spaces in schools
- professional learning within the school and across multiple schools/campuses

Schools have the autonomy to make their own operational decisions about staff activities balancing risk and safety measures to support well-being of staff and students. Schools are encouraged to proceed with their usual staff activities and events taking into consideration COVID smart risk mitigation as relevant.

PARENTS AND VISITORS

Can visitors who are household/close contacts visit the school?

Changes to the Public Health Order on 14 October 2022 removed any requirements for household/close contacts of people who have tested positive to COVID-19.

Independent schools can determine their own policy for allowing visitors who have been in recent contact with a person who has tested positive to COVID-19 to attend the school site. Where a school's policy allows visitors on site, then COVID safe planning based on the school's own risk assessment should be undertaken to mitigate risk.

More information about household/close contacts is found here.

Are QR check in codes mandatory in schools?

Schools are not required to use Service NSW QR codes for check-in.

Service NSW QR codes will continue to be available, but schools may choose to use their existing systems for recording visitors.

What are the current protocols for unvaccinated visitors?

Independent schools can determine their own policy for allowing unvaccinated visitors to attend the school site.

Where a school's policy allows unvaccinated visitors on site, then COVID safe planning based on the school's own risk assessment should be undertaken to mitigate risk.

What about pick-ups and drop-offs?

Schools can determine their own policy for arrangements around student pick-ups and drop-offs.

Can uniform shops/canteens/parent reading groups etc operate?

Yes, uniform shops, canteens and parent reading groups can operate. As with other activities, schools should undertake their own risk assessment process to identify risk mitigation strategies for uniform shops, canteens.

Are schools allowed to have external organisations onsite to run activities?

Yes – external organisations can come onsite to run activities such as sport or music.

Where schools engage external organisations to run activities on site, those organisations should undertake their own COVID safe risk assessments and share these with the school.

Similarly, if the school has any specific requirements on visitors, then those processes should be followed by representatives from external organisations.

STAFF SHORTAGES

Including Remote/hybrid & Staff refusal

While schools may continue to experience a reduction in staffing due to staff illness, ensuring continuity of education is crucial. Schools will need to consider layered protocols for managing staff shortages to ensure student safety and continuity of face to face learning.

As was the case in 2021, schools may consider implementing hybrid models of learning (i.e., a combination of face to face and learning from home) where needed, however, face to face learning should remain the first option.

Can schools do remote/ hybrid learning? What if we need to close the school?

Schools will need to consider protocols for managing staff shortages to ensure student safety and continuity of learning.

There is strong support from NSW Health for the continuation of face-to-face learning and it is expected that schools make it a priority to remain open and only move to learning from home for all students in exceptional circumstances.

As was the case in 2021, where needed, schools may consider implementing hybrid models of learning (i.e., a combination of face-to-face and learning from home).

Implementing hybrid models of learning during the pandemic, including remote learning where other options have been exhausted does not impact on meeting NESA school registration requirements.

If the whole school needs to move to learning from home and is non-operational for a period of time the school is requested to notify the AISNSW COVID-19 support team to enable AISNSW to notify the relevant authorities.

What can be done to handle staff shortages?

Schools can employ a range of layered strategies to manage schools including the usual processes such as engaging casual teachers or combining classes, implementing hybrid learning models or transiting to remote learning. Some schools may be able to draw on non-teaching staff to either teach if accredited or supervise students.

Can schools put multiple classes in a school hall?

Yes, schools could put multiple classes in a school hall if needed, particularly as a short-term solution taking into consideration the size of the space and other COVID safe strategies that are available.

Can schools employ retired, unaccredited teachers to supervise students?

Staff who are not accredited i.e. retired unaccredited teachers, or support staff can supervise students without an accredited teacher present if they are not delivering the NESA curriculum. For example, the accredited teacher may deliver the lesson online with another staff member (unaccredited teacher, or teacher's aide) in the classroom for supervision purposes. Note:

Support Staff who supervise students must be paid at School Assistant Level 3 for small groups of students (less than 10), or School Assistant Level 4 for large groups of students.

Unaccredited teachers should be paid as teachers as the MEA does not differentiate between unaccredited or accredited teachers.

Some schools may ask parents to volunteer for supervision. If that is the case, the parent should hold a valid WWCC clearance and receive child protection training (use AISNSW online module) and duty of care induction, so they understand their responsibilities in terms of supervision and child protection.

Schools may choose to engage parents as casual school assistants to avoid any potential employment relations issues.

Volunteers or casual employees are covered by the same child protection laws and must be inducted and trained before they commence.

Which type of leave should be used for COVID related staff absences?

Information about leave arrangements for staff absent due to COVID-19 can be found here.

BOARDING

The Public Health (COVID-19 Self-Isolation) Order was updated on 14 October 2022 to remove COVID-19 isolation requirements in NSW. From this date there are no longer any isolation requirements for people who have tested positive to COVID-19 or for household/close contacts in school settings including in boarding facilities.

As with other parts of a school's operation, schools should continue to implement school-based risk assessment processes and risk mitigation for their boarding setting and are able to make their own decisions based on school-based risk assessments. As well as considering the general COVID-19 advice for schools as outlined in this document, boarding schools should also consider the specific guidance in this section for the residential boarding facilities in the school.

It is important to acknowledge that boarding schools are highly experienced and expert at running boarding facilities and managing risk.

All school sectors continue to work closely with NSW Health and other key government agencies in planning and managing school operations for reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. Additional risk and health advice applies in residential settings due to the ease with which COVID-19 spreads within household environments.

Boarding schools should continue to apply additional risk mitigation measures as required, particularly when there are high levels of community transmission.

NSW Health continues to encourage Boarding schools to review their protocols for flu alongside those for COVID-19 and be aware that both viruses are likely to be circulating in the school community. The infection control steps used to prevent transmission of COVID-19 will also help to control the transmission of flu. Students and staff should be encouraged to have their annual flu vaccination, as it is effective at both preventing severe illness and transmission.

In relation to school-based risk assessment processes and risk mitigation in boarding settings, it is important that schools:

- can satisfy that they are meeting all workplace, health and safety (WHS) obligations
- have informed the school community about the approach to managing COVID-19 cases in the school, in both the residential and the day areas of the school.

What are some considerations for students and staff returning to boarding schools or their place of residence?

In addition to the COVID safe practices that boarding houses were implementing in 2021, schools may consider a range of risk mitigation strategies prior students and staff returning to the boarding facility such as individual assessments identifying if the boarder or staff member has tested positive to COVID-19, or has any COVID-19 symptoms. Schools may consider requesting boarders and staff to undertaking RAHT testing before returning and consider vaccination status and the individual's health vulnerabilities as a part of the school's risk assessment processes. Consent should be sought for the use of rapid antigen testing at school.

What are some considerations for residential area management?

Implementing infection control and physical distancing measures consistent with the current health advice is critical in a residential setting. In line with community settings, where there are low numbers of COVID-19 cases in the community or school, the school may relax some of the

COVID-19 measures in place in residential settings. These may include removal of mask requirements in residential areas, relaxation of cohorting and staggering of meal times.

Where case numbers increase or cases are identified in the boarding school, the school should consider the reintroduction of these layered measures for short periods to reduce the risk of transmission within the residential setting.

It might be useful to consider the following strategies to limit risk in this environment:

- minimise use of shared bathroom facilities where possible. Where shared bathrooms are required consider rostering and allocating specific boarders to these shared facilities at specific times. Additional cleaning, especially touch surface cleaning with a weak bleach solution a number of times a day, is recommended by NSW Health
- measures to reduce group numbers and maintaining physical distancing in recreational areas and when engaging in activities outside of school hours
- where possible, staggering rostered meal times and providing individual meals and cutlery in dining areas to reduce group numbers and implementing cleaning, especially touch surface cleaning, between dining/meal session
- encourage mask wearing in common areas such as those accessed by large numbers of people such as a shared foyer or lobby, lifts, recreation areas accessed by large numbers of students, dining rooms when not eating, stairwells and corridors and shared laundry facilities. Where small residential cohorts are established and access to areas is staggered by cohorts, mask wearing may be relaxed for student well-being.

Reducing interaction between year groups or established student cohorts minimises the risk and scale of transmission while in the school residential areas if a student was to test positive to COVID-19.

Are there any restrictions to how many students are in dormitories? Are cohorts still needed for eating, etc?

There are no additional restrictions on boarding accommodation. Schools can use their own risk assessments to determine the appropriate number of students in a dormitory.

Schools should still consider reducing interaction of students within the boarding facility for both sleeping, eating and other activities as a risk mitigation strategy. Particularly given the transmissibility of COVID-19 in residential settings and given that people are infectious for two days before they become symptomatic with COVID-19.

What are some considerations for personal hygiene practices in a boarding facility?

Students and staff should be reminded regularly of the importance of rigorous appropriate personal hygiene practices. Information could include:

- advising staff immediately if they feel unwell or have any COVID-19 symptoms (including but not limited to headache, sore throat, tiredness, diarrhoea, fever)
- washing hands for 20 seconds with soap and water at regular intervals throughout the day, particularly before and after eating and after going to the toilet
- regular and appropriate use of hand sanitiser throughout the day and particularly after contact with touch surfaces

- respiratory hygiene (e.g. covering a cough or sneeze in the crook of the arm, not into the hand)
- placing used tissues and other personal items straight into a bin and then hand washing
- avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth
- not sharing food or drink
- not sharing personal items such as mobile phones, pens and pencils etc.
- wiping down shared surfaces before and after use (including where students study and in recreational areas) or when sharing equipment in common areas or in shared rooms arrangements
- where possible, maximising physical distance (for example, through floor markings and furniture placement) to reduce contact with other students and staff.

What are some considerations for mask wearing in a boarding facility?

From Monday 28 February 2022, masks were no longer mandatory for staff, students and visitors in secondary school settings.

From Monday 7 March 2022, masks were no longer be mandatory for staff and visitors in primary school and early childhood settings.

From 14 October 2022, mask requirements for people who have tested positive to COVID-19 or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive were removed meaning boarding school staff and students are no longer required to wear a mask at school or in residential areas. However, NSW Health strongly encourages people who have COVID-19 and people who have been exposed to COVID-19 to wear a mask to reduce the risk of transmission. Further information about NSW Health advice for people with COVID-19 and for people who have been exposed to COVID-19 is available here.

Schools should consider reintroducing mask requirements for staff and students in residential areas in the event of a positive COVID-19 case in the cohort, or where other concerns arise in the school community.

Masks are no longer mandatory on public transport.

What are some considerations for environmental hygiene in a boarding facility?

NSW Health advises that cleaning in the residential areas should include:

- an additional focus on high touch surfaces in common areas and recreational spaces
- daily cleaning of all residential rooms with a particular focus on touch surfaces
- vigilant cleaning and personal hygiene practices in all canteen and food preparation areas, including the use of masks by staff while preparing and serving food
- cleaning arrangement in bathrooms during the day, and shower areas after times they are regularly used
- sufficient soap, hand sanitiser and disinfectant wipes are available at all times.

What are some considerations for ventilation in a boarding facility?

Maximising natural ventilation is an effective method for minimising the spread of COVID-19 and flu. Encourage good ventilation with fresh air by opening windows and doors where practicable or running a modern air conditioner with optimised settings.

Schools should note the following considerations:

- in line with community settings, square metre rules are no longer in place. However, if activities or events are indoors, ensure the space is well ventilated and as large as possible for the number of attendees to avoid crowding
- prioritise outdoor settings for activities and events wherever practicable, as outdoor spaces have great natural ventilation and represent a lower risk than indoor settings.

What are some considerations for physical distancing in a boarding facility?

Boarding schools should consider maintaining a strong focus on physical distancing measures in residential areas to minimise the risk of transmission where possible.

Although staff and students are not required to maintain physical distancing at school, it is advisable that they are asked to maintain physical distancing where practicable throughout the school day. Reducing close physical contact and maintaining physical distancing between students and staff in residential areas of the school is highly recommended.

Where possible consider the following measures:

- where there are high case numbers, consider restricting recreation areas and activities to year groups or established student cohorts where possible – this may require a school to establish a schedule to minimise interaction between groups
- displaying posters to promote physical distancing and hygiene requirements
- limit boarders from entering any residential area other than their own
- staff and students must comply with the relevant public health orders
- keeping records of who attends essential off-campus activities.

Where possible consider the following measures:

- limiting non-essential visitors, such as those not related to curriculum delivery or maintenance and infrastructure works from visiting the residential area, where visitors are considered essential by the principal, including for student wellbeing, risk assessments to support the visitors' attendance
- identifying specific locations for deliveries and entry for visitors to the school to minimise unnecessary contact with staff and students at the school
- advising all staff, boarding and non-boarding students and contractors to not attend school if they have tested positive to COVID-19 or have any signs or symptoms of COVID-19. If unwell, boarding students should not attend classes or school activities and should report illness to staff
- undertaking regular/daily check-ins with boarders to monitor mental health and wellbeing and screen for COVID-19 symptoms (including mild ones)
- undertaking and regularly reviewing risk assessments for residential staff and students' movements outside of school grounds, particularly when there are high levels of community transmission
- using rapid antigen testing for symptomatic testing
- ensuring that when students are using rapid antigen testing, appropriate consent has been granted and supervision measures are in place to support duty of care and wellbeing
- a PCR test may be used to validate a positive result from a surveillance test. The student or staff member who tested positive on a rapid antigen test should isolate until the result of the PCR test is received. A PCR test may also be used to confirm influenza infection where a student has respiratory symptoms but RAT is negative for COVID-19.
- in the event of a case, the school could also consider PCR tests instead of rapid antigen tests for household contacts to enable rapid identification of secondary cases
- considering any individual health care plans or needs for students and staff living in residential facilities, including whether the staff or student can access alternative arrangements.

What are some considerations for managing staff and student illnesses in a boarding facility?

Schools are experienced in managing student injury and illness, including for those who reside at the school during the school term and have appropriate nursing staff and clinics in place.

If a boarding student or staff member develop COVID-19 like or respiratory symptoms the following processes should be considered:

- the person should be taken to an appropriate area where they can be assessed and isolated immediately (e.g. sick bay or clinic)
- implementing appropriate infection control
- the usual assessment of the person's condition should be carried out by trained staff wearing appropriate PPE and a determination made on whether they require urgent medical assistance. If so, an ambulance should be called immediately.
- if the person presents with any of the COVID-19 symptoms:
  - runny nose
  - headache
  - fatigue

- – sore throat
- – cough
- – sneezing
- – fever (37.5 degrees Celsius or higher)
- – shortness of breath (difficulty breathing)
- – loss of taste
- – loss of smell

then the unwell person should remain in the clinic or other suitable location, isolated from all other staff and students and a rapid antigen test should be conducted.

In some circumstances, NSW Health recommend a positive rapid antigen test should be confirmed with a PCR (nose and throat swab). In this case, the following processes should be considered:

- where possible the person conducting the PCR test should come to the school to avoid transporting the student unnecessary. Each school should consider having an established process in place either through a local pathology provider or the local Public Health Unit to conduct on-site testing if needed
- meals being delivered to the student in isolation using disposable plates and cutlery during this time without direct contact with the student. Staff collecting plates etc from the student's room must be wearing PPE
- parents/carers should be notified that the student is unwell and will be tested for COVID-19. The school, parents and health team should undertake a risk assessment to determine the most appropriate arrangements for managing the child.

If a boarding student or staff member who is unwell tests negative for COVID-19, the usual processes to support students and staff while they recover from illness should be implemented, for example:

- following personal hygiene arrangements to minimise the risk of others becoming unwell at the school
- preventing students with COVID-like symptoms from attending school until symptoms clear, even if the test is negative
- staff who are unwell and live off-site not attending or engaging in activities at school including residential areas. Staff should make arrangements to be tested for COVID-19 and not return until they are symptom free
- schools should be aware that flu may also be circulating in the school. Influenza testing (which is currently included in PCR testing) should be considered, particularly where multiple boarding students have respiratory symptoms but COVID-19 testing is negative
- where two or more cases of flu are identified among boarding students, NSW Health encourages schools to contact their local Public Health Unit for advice. Anyone with symptoms should be isolated from others until their symptoms resolve.

How should a school respond to a positive test in a boarding facility?

On 14 October 2022, the requirement for people who have tested positive to COVID-19 in NSW to isolate was removed from the Public Health Order. If a person tested positive to COVID-19 prior to this date and were required to isolate is no longer required to isolate from 14 October 2022. Students and staff should not attend school if they have acute symptoms for COVID-19 or other respiratory illnesses.

Independent schools are responsible for completing their own risk assessments may determine their own school-based requirements for students and staff who have tested positive to COVID-19 in residential settings.

Boarding schools may determine the most appropriate way to manage a boarding student who has tested positive to COVID-19 to support the student ans minimise risk of transmission. This may include supporting the student to isolate in the boarding facility separately to other students and staff who have not tested positive or enable the student to return home (depending on the individual circumstances).

NSW Health strongly recommends that people who have tested positive to COVID-19 should try stay separated from people they live with until their acute symptoms (such as runny nose, sore throat, cough, fever) have gone. NSW Health also recommends that people in shared accommodation, such as a boarding facility:

- remain inside their own room as much as possible
- avoid shared facilities or common areas
- wear a mask any time they leave their room
- open windows if possible/safe to maximise fresh air and natural ventilation
- have any deliveries, including food, left outside their door.

Schools should undertake planning for how they will safely manage a single case or multiple cases within the residential facility, including:

- considering reintroducing a range of layered measures early in the response, such as:
  - increased ventilation and environmental hygiene
  - mask-wearing in indoor residential areas accessed by large numbers of people
  - cohorting students (in line with household contact assessments)
  - restricting visitors to residential areas
- an assessment by the school of the contact status of boarders and staff (identification of household-like contacts or other contacts at higher risk)
- an approach to regular testing of all household contacts
- management of illness and the safety of staff caring for infected people
- contacting the parent or carer to have a risk assessment discussion to agree on the arrangements for the student's support and treatment where relevant
- consideration of recording additional information on vaccination status to support case management following exposure
- measures adopted to prevent and mitigate an outbreak of COVID-19 are applicable to other infectious illnesses
- encouraging students and staff to get a flu vaccination
- thorough cleaning of the school and residential facilities
- communication with parents and the broader community to notify of the confirmed case and any disruption to school operations and keep them informed.

The school's approach to managing single or multiple cases of COVID-19 within the boarding facility should be communicated to families in advance.

Where a boarding student or staff member who has tested positive is off-site, the school should consider if they should not return to school for a period of time as determined by the school and until they are no longer displaying symptoms.

What support is available if there are multiple positive case in a boarding facility?

If school has multiple cases in boarding the school is requested to notify the AISNSW COVID-19 support team to enable AISNSW to facilitate liaison with NSW Health as appropriate for further advice.

AISNSW can notify the NSW Health Public Health Response Branch (PHRB) of the situation and management steps that the school has implemented and request additional public health advice, if required. The PHRB has a central coordination role and can notify the local Public Health Unit (PHU) for their awareness and, engage the PHU to provide additional advice to support the school's response where requested.

Independent schools are also able to directly contact their local Public Health Unit for risk assessment advice and support should an outbreak occur in their boarding facility.

Who is considered as having a high risk of exposure toCOVID-19 in a boarding facility?

Students or staff members are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 from people they share sleeping or intimate communal spaces with where masks and physical distancing are not applied.

When assessing who should is considered at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 from a positive case, schools will need to assess the configuration and size of the residential area within the boarding school and consider not only where students sleep, but also how they interact and share common living areas, including bathrooms.

Examples of a high risk contact may include:

- students who share a bedroom space
- students who have separate bedrooms but share common areas similar to how individuals would share space in a household, for example shared common areas indoors where masks are not worn and physical distancing is not maintained
- where students sleep in dormitory-type settings, the school will assess who should be considered a household contact based on factors relevant to that specific setting, including consideration of other COVID-smart layered measures in place. Schools may request further advice from their local Public Health Unit to assist with these assessments.

Single overnight stays (for example, by rotating staff) are not considered household contacts, however, they have a higher likelihood of infection and may also wish to self-isolate.

NSW Health has examples of high, moderate and low risk exposure in its Fact Sheet for people exposed to COVID-19.

What processes should be put in place for students exposed to positive cases in residential areas?

Changes to the Public Health Order on 14 October 2022 removed any requirements for household/close contacts of people who have tested positive to COVID-19.

Independent schools are responsible for completing their own risk assessments may determine their own school-based requirements for students, staff and visitors who have been in contact with someone who has tested positive to COVID-19, for example notifying the school and implementing additional risk mitigation strategies (such as wearing mask) while attending the school.

Any student that has been in close contact with a positive case in a residential setting should be tested as soon as possible.

If a positive result is received, the school will follow their procedure for managing COVID-19 cases in students.

If the student's COVID-19 test is negative the school may consider implementing additional risk measures in line with the NSW Health Information for people who have been exposed to COVID-19.

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Can staff and students who are household/close contacts attend special schools?

Changes to the Public Health Order on 14 October 2022 removed any requirements for household/close contacts of people who have tested positive to COVID-19.

Independent schools are responsible for completing their own risk assessments may determine their own school-based requirements for students, staff and visitors who have been in contact with someone who has tested positive to COVID-19, for example notifying the school and implementing additional risk mitigation strategies (such as wearing mask) while attending the school.

NSW Health have advised that people who have come into contact with someone who has tested positive to COVID-19 who are at high or moderate risk of exposure should not visit some high-risk settings such as disability care settings or hospitals.

To align with this advice, Special Schools, and schools with special education units, should consider requesting staff and students in these settings to not attend the school site while they are a household/close contact. The NSW Department of Education has decided, in consultation with NSW Health, that staff and students in an SSP or support unit (including Assisted Travel Program drivers and officers) will not be permitted to return to school for 7 days from the date their household member tested positive and will need to continue working from home where possible for the duration of the isolation period.

RAHT testing for special schools

On 19 February, the NSW Premier and Minister for Education announced a move from routine surveillance testing in schools conducted for the first 4 weeks of Term 1, 2022 to the provision of a supply of additional RAHT tests to students and staff members to be used at their discretion for the remainder of Term 1, 2022. On 23 March 2022, the Minister for Education announced that the NSW Government will continue to support the use of rapid antigen tests (RATs) for symptomatic testing in schools across all sectors until at least the end of Term 1.

Independent schools with recognition as a special school should receive a further automatic delivery of 2 RAHT multipacks for every student and staff member by COB 10 August 2022 to provide a supply for Term 3. These RAHT kits can be used for symptomatic testing or for daily testing as part of the close contact requirements. Schools can order additional tests for staff through their COVID-19 COS account if required.

More information about RAHT testing and ordering RAHT kits is available here.

What are the requirements for wearing masks in a special school?

Although wearing masks is no longer a requirement, independent schools may consider implementing masks as a risk mitigation strategy for staff working with students with disability. The NSW Department of Education has indicated that it will continue to require disability support staff in government schools to wear masks when working directly with those students.

Where practical, students in Year 7 or above travelling on Assisted School Travel services should continue to be encouraged to wear a mask.

As per current NSW Department of Education advice, all drivers and Assisted Travel Support Officers are required to wear a mask while in or around Assisted School Travel vehicles.

Refer to the information about masks, including ordering additional mask supplies, found here.

Managing cases in special schools

The general advice for managing cases in schools found here also apply to special schools.

NSW Health advice is that people who have tested positive to COVID-19 should not visit high-risk settings such as hospitals, disability and aged care facilities that staff should only return to these settings after seven days, subject to their own work, health, and safety assessment, and if symptom-free.

The NSW Department of Education has decided, in consultation with NSW Health, that staff and students in an SSP or support unit (including Assisted Travel Program drivers and officers) who have tested positive to COVID-19 will not be permitted to return to school for 7 days from the date they tested positive. Independent schools continue to have the discretion to allow students and staff in special schools to return to school once they no longer have symptoms.

It is recognised that special schools and schools with cohorts of students with disability cater for vastly different student needs, and therefore may benefit from additional public health support compared to other school settings due to:

- students attending these settings being at greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19 infection due to underlying medical conditions
- students and staff possibly being unable to maintain risk mitigation strategies, such as mask wearing, physical distancing, and rapid antigen testing, due to the additional needs of students, leading to a greater potential for transmission in these settings.

If a special school, or a school with a cohort(s) of students with disability have multiple positive cases within these cohorts, the school is requested to notify the AISNSW COVID-19 support team to enable AISNSW to facilitate liaison with NSW Health as appropriate for further advice.

AISNSW can notify the NSW Health Public Health Response Branch (PHRB) of the current situation and management steps that the school has implemented and request additional public health advice, if required. The PHRB has a central coordination role and can notify the local Public Heath Unit (PHU) for their awareness and, engage the PHU to provide additional advice to support the school's response where requested. For example, where the school has concerns existing risk mitigations are unable to be implemented and the next appropriate action is unclear, or where additional clinical support is required for contacts e.g. difficulty accessing testing.

Independent schools are also able to directly contact their local Public Health Unit for risk assessment advice and support should they be managing positive cases relating to students with disability.

What kind of additional advice and support might a school be able to access from NSW Health?

Where additional advice and support from NSW Health is requested by a school, AISNSW will work with NSW Health to assist in a case-by-case assessment of the situation and a tailored approach to support the management by the school of individual student cases as the COVID-19 risk in each school setting will vary depending on the students' needs and the risk mitigation strategies that are able to be implemented.

Generally, the need for additional support from the local Public Heath Unit (PHU) beyond the implementation of existing school-based strategies could be considered when there are 3 or more cases in the same class, or 5 or more cases in a year group, in a 7 day period. However, additional support may be appropriate at a lower number of cases given context, risks and needs identified by the school and/or PHU.

Other considerations include the pattern of transmission across the school and feasibility of the suggested control measures, as well as the nature of the student's health needs.

Examples of public health advice that may be recommended depending on the context include:

- screening/testing
  - symptom screening and exclusion of symptomatic individuals
  - change to testing regime/type, for example, reviewing regularity of RAHT testing and/or recommending a negative PCR test prior to return to school
  - testing household members if child unable to test

- isolation/cohorting
  - cohort high risk contacts in classes
  - home isolation of high-risk contacts for 7 days since last contact with the case (as per advice for high risk contacts).

- learning from home
  - learning from home for the cohort (class or grade)
  - learning from home for the school community

  Note: Schools are able to revert to learning from home (cohort/school) or become non-operational at their own discretion.

- clinical support
  - additional support may be required by the school to coordinate testing and other clinical services depending on individual students' needs. This may require the PHU liaising with relevant local heath district teams.

COMMUNITY USE OF FACILITIES

Are third parties such as community groups permitted to use school facilities?

Yes – third parties such as community groups can come onsite to use school facilities.

For example, many schools allow community sports or arts groups, community language groups, playgroups, and other community activities or meetings to use their facilities out of hours.

Where this occurs, those organisations or external groups should:

- undertake their own COVID safe risk assessments and share these with the school
- follow NSW Government requirements as relevant
- be made aware of any COVID-safe requirements that the school has for the use of its facilities.

Where there are arrangements for community use of school facilities, schools may consider the following:

- community users sign-in/check-in arrangements
- plans in place to minimise interaction between the community users and school students and staff
- where possible, community use of school sites utilising outdoor spaces and being held after hours
- whether additional cleaning is required following the community use of school premises – it's a school decision about who is responsible for that cleaning
- the school's own policy regarding the vaccination status of visitors on site, including any facilitators and other visitors participating in the community activity.

Schools may also consider requesting any community groups using the school's facilities to complete a community use acknowledgement to confirm they will comply with COVID-19 requirements. A Community Use Acknowledgement template adapted on the NSW Department of Education template is available for schools to use/adapt (*click on the button to download the template*).

Click here for
Community Use Acknowledgement template

(This link will download a word document to your machine)

CLEANING AND VENTILATION

What level of regular cleaning is required? And is anything different required after a positive case?

NSW Health recommend the same routine cleaning and disinfecting in schools as in the rest of the community.

Deep cleaning is no longer required after a positive case in a school, just an additional routine clean is sufficient.

NSW Health guidance recommends that frequently touched surfaces (doorknobs and equipment for example) are cleaned on a more frequent basis using a household detergent, followed by disinfectant. Alternatively, you can use detergent/disinfectant wipes as long as you scrub the surface hard.

What should schools be doing about ventilation?

The virus that causes COVID-19 along with other respiratory viruses can be spread from person to person through contact with droplets, which are produced when a person sneezes or coughs, or through other small respiratory particles that are produced when people talk, sing or shout.

These small particles can remain in the air for some time. Particles in the air may build up if there is not enough ventilation, for example, if a group of people sing or speak loudly in an indoor space without the windows or doors open.

Open or well-ventilated spaces reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 because infectious particles are more quickly diffused in the open air than in spaces with less ventilation.

Transmission of COVID-19 is more common indoors, where there may be less space to physically distance, and where people may come into contact with droplets and airborne particles more easily.

To help reduce the risk, it is important to take steps to improve ventilation in indoor settings so that any infectious particles that may be present in the air are more quickly removed.

NSW Health therefore continue to encourage maximising ventilation in indoor areas where possible.

So for example in schools that could be:

- opening windows and doors to create an air flow
- considering the use of outdoor and covered areas wherever possible in preference to indoor spaces
- avoid directing fans towards people's faces, such as by aiming them continuously towards the ceiling or floor and limiting oscillation and turbulence of fans
- use of air purifiers where available and practical.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND THOSE RETURNING FROM OVERSEAS

Can students on a visa come to Australia?

All Australian COVID19 related border restrictions have been lifted, international students can now travel to NSW and attend school.

All visa holders, including unvaccinated visa holders are able to arrive in Australia without needing an approved travel exemption.

What are the isolation requirements for students entering Australia from overseas?

From 30 April 2022, unvaccinated international returning travellers are no longer required to undertake hotel quarantine or COVID-19 testing.

When can a student attend school after entering Australia from overseas?

All students arriving from overseas can attend school as soon as they have arrived in Australia.

What are the vaccination and mask requirements for international students entering NSW?

Travel requirements to Australia have changed. From 6 July 2022, travellers to Australia no longer need to:

- provide evidence of vaccination status
- complete the Digital Passenger Declaration or Maritime Travel Declaration
- have a travel exemption if they are unvaccinated.

International travellers to NSW:

- are not required to take a COVID-19 test on arrival
- are not required to wear a face mask in airports or while on an aircraft in Australia.

It is important to remember that airlines, vessel operators and other countries may have specific requirements that travellers need to comply with. It is your responsibility to ensure you meet the requirements of the airline you are travelling with and any countries you transit through.

Unvaccinated international arrivals will not be required to undertake hotel quarantine and will follow the same guidelines as fully vaccinated international arrivals.

For updated information about Australia's travel requirements, please visit the Department of Home Affairs website.

When can international student exchange programs resume?

On 12 May 2022, the *NSW Registration Committee for International Secondary Student Exchange* (NRCISSE) approved the resumption of secondary student exchange programs in NSW operated by registered Student Exchange Organisations effective immediately.

In order for a registered Student Exchange Organisation (SEO) to resume their student exchange programs, the SEO is required to update their processes and agreements/contracts in accordance with *Updated National Guidelines for the Operation of International Secondary*

Student Exchange Programs in Australia and submit a COVID-19 risk management plan to the NSW Department of Education for approval.

More information about student exchange programs, including a list of registered Student Exchange Organisations, is available [here](#).

COVID-19 ROLL MARKING AND STUDENT ATTENDANCE

It is a NESA school registration requirement that schools record student absences and variations to attendance using the Minister's attendance codes. This requirement also applies to COVID-19 related absences.

Refer to the following advice on how to use the Minister's attendance codes when marking the roll for COVID-19 related absences.

Guidance on roll marking

Currently, there are three COVID-19 categories of attendance that will affect the codes used for roll marking.

	Face to face learning at school	Learning from home - teacher assisted (cohorts or schools)	Learning from home - self-paced learning (individuals)
Description	Roll marked as usual, i.e. according to the Minister's codes: Schools are open for face-to-face learning and all students are expected to attend school on-site.	Roll marked as 'F': Where a class, year group or whole school is instructed to learn from home and the student is participating in the learning.	Roll marked as 'F': Where an individual student is required to learn from home due to a medical reason or a Public Health Order and the student is participating in learning.

For students who are unwell there is no expectation that learning from home be completed. The Principal or their delegate, may grant sick leave to students whose absences are satisfactorily explained as being due to illness and should be marked as 'S'.

Under the Education Act students are required to attend school unless they have a valid reason not to do so. There is no provision available for an exemption from attendance to be granted for COVID related absences. Schools should follow their usual processes to manage unsatisfactory attendance.

Marking the roll – face to face learning

Regular roll marking procedures as outlined in the school's attendance policy and procedures and the use of the Minister's attendance codes apply (*click on the button to download the Minister's attendance codes).*

Click here for the
Minister's attendance codes

(This link will download a word document to your machine)

Marking the roll – learning from home – teacher assisted (cohorts or schools)

In cases where a cohort of students or the whole school are instructed to commence learning from home due to COVID-19 related reasons and the students learning is facilitated by a teacher, these students may be counted as attending school through a 'variation to attendance' using attendance code 'F' if there is reasonable evidence of participation in learning from home.

Each school may determine its own processes and thresholds regarding minimum standards of participation according to age and stage of learning as well as the mode of learning (whether that be online, hard copy deliveries or a combination of both).

Reasonable evidence of minimum standards of participation may include things such as:

- student completion of specific work during a set time period allocated by the school e.g. worksheets, activities and online tasks that are submitted to the teacher by a specified date. Schools should take account of students whose work may be delivered and collected in hard copy.
- student engagement with online lessons e.g. the teacher keeps a roll of student attendance and/or participation in online lessons.

Students who meet the school's participation requirements can be marked on the roll as 'F'. Students who do not meet the school's participation requirements should generally be marked as 'A' unless an explanation is received from a parent and accepted by the principal that would require the use of a different code e.g. 'S' or 'L'.

Marking the roll – learning from home – self-paced learning (individuals)

In cases where an individual student is requested to learn from home due to a COVID-19 related medical reason or Public Health Order and they are provided with access to self-paced learning materials, these students may be counted as attending school through a 'variation to attendance' using attendance code 'F' if there is reasonable evidence of participation in learning from home using attendance code 'F'.

Each school may determine its own processes and thresholds regarding minimum standards of participation in the context of the student's access to and engagement with any learning activities provided by the school while learning from home.

Reasonable evidence may include things such as:

- student completion of self-paced learning materials
- reasonable attempts made to complete self-paced learning materials.

Students who meet the school's participation requirements can be marked on the roll as 'F'. Students who do not meet the school's participation requirements should generally be marked as 'A' unless an explanation is received from a parent and accepted by the principal that would require the use of a different code e.g. 'S' or 'L'.

COVID-19 related reasons for using the 'F' code for individuals during face to face learning

There may be a range of COVID-19 related reasons for an individual student to participate in learning from home while the rest of their class, cohort or the whole school is expected to attend school face to face. These may include where:

- a student is self-isolating or has been requested to not attend school for a period of time because they have tested positive to COVID-19 or are a high risk of exposure (family – living in the same household) to a positive COVID-19 case
- a student lives with a family member who has a serious medical condition or disability and is at greater risk of serious illness if they contract COVID-19 and a medical certificate is provided
- a student has an ongoing medical condition that means the student is unable to attend school and a medical certificate is provided.

Student absences

If parents or carers believe that their child has a condition that means it's not safe for them to return to school, they will need to provide a medical certificate to support their child's absence. In this instance, schools should encourage families to speak with their doctor or health care provider to develop a COVID-19 Action Plan (incorporating a health care plan if required) to support decision-making about their activities, including attendance at school.

In relation to medical certificates, if there is an ongoing pattern of poor attendance and welfare concerns, under chapter 16a of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1999*, the Principal is able to contact the student's GP to discuss the matter. Principals will need to provide evidence of their concern as a part of their request for information under chapter 16a.

If students have not returned to school, a compassionate and common-sense approach should be used. Schools should work with the student and their parent or carer to put a plan in place to support the students return to school. If needed, principals can contact the AISNSW Student Services Portfolio for assistance with planning and intervention strategies to support an individual student's return to school.

Can a student attend school if they are displaying COVID-19 symptoms?

Current NSW Health strongly advises that if a student is unwell and has any symptoms for any illness they should stay home and test for COVID-19.

Whether the test comes back positive or negative for COVID-19, the student should not return to school until either:

- the student no longer has any symptoms, or
- a medical certificate is provided to the school confirming that symptoms are explained by another diagnosis (such as hay fever).

NSW Health advises that it is important that students do not attend school if they are unwell, even if they have tested negative for COVID-19. Rapid antigen tests can produce false negative results and symptoms of other illnesses can also be similar to COVID-19, including flu, the common cold and stomach bugs. Health advice is that students who are sick should always stay home to rest and recover and avoid putting other students and staff at risk of getting sick.

Responding to unexplained student absences during learning from home

It is important that schools consider processes for monitoring student attendance and engagement during learning from home periods.

There are no prescribed requirements for frequency or method for monitoring student engagement during periods pf learning from home, but schools may consider checking in on each student several times per week. Schools may also identify families they wish to have more regular contact with to check student wellbeing and support engagement with learning.

Schools should follow their regular procedures for following up with families in relation to any unexplained absence which are usually undertaken on the same day or next day of the absence. For students who are learning from home, where there are multiple consecutive days (e.g. three days in a row) of unexplained 'absences', schools should consider whether there are child protection concerns and refer to their child protection policy as relevant.

Student absence where the student is symptomatic but refuses to be tested

Any child that has COVID-19 symptoms should not attend school while symptomatic.

Where a student with COVID-19 symptoms has not tested positive, or is refusing/their parents or carers are refusing testing, schools should ask the student to not attend school until their acute symptoms are gone.

It is paramount that symptomatic individuals do not attend school until symptoms have resolved.

For students who are unwell there is no expectation that learning from home be completed. The Principal or their delegate, may grant sick leave to students whose absences are satisfactorily explained as being due to illness and should be marked as 'S'.

Reporting students who have withdrawn their enrolment from the school

In line with usual practice, if the enrolment of a student under the age of 17 is withdrawn and the school doesn't know the student's next educational setting, the school should notify the NSW Department of Education (DoE) that the student's destination is unknown using the Student Destination Unknown form (*click on the button to download the Student Destination Unknown form*).

Click here for the
Student Destination Unknown form

(This link will download a word document to your machine)

Where a student is leaving the school to undertake home schooling, the parents/carers will need to make an application to register their child for home schooling with NESA in order to meet their obligations under the Education Act. It may take up to 12 weeks for an application for home schooling registration to be finalised. If home schooling registration is granted by NESA, the parents/carers will be provided with a certificate of home schooling registration. A student is not officially registered for home schooling until they are in receipt of this NESA certificate. If the school has been notified that a student is leaving to undertaken home schooling but the family has not provided evidence of their child's home schooling registration certificate from NESA by the date of the end of the enrolment, the school should notify DoE using the Destination Unknown form indicating that the family have advised that they intend to home school their child. DoE and can liaise with NESA regarding the child's registration for home schooling.

Guidance on medical certificates

In line with usual practice, whenever possible and appropriate schools should engage with the students' parents/carers to understand their concerns about their child returning to on site learning and discuss the support that can be put in place to address these concerns so the student can return to school.

Principals should use their discretion when requesting a medical certificate or other evidence to justify an absence.

What do I do if the medical certificate has no end date?

The principal has the discretion to accept or reject a medical certificate. Schools may indicate to parents that the medical certificate will be accepted for a reasonable length of time as an

explanation for absence, this period of time will vary depending on the medical condition referred to in the certificate and the needs of individual students.

It is generally accepted in matters relating to medical certificates relied on in a legal context that medical certificates may reasonably refer to a maximum period of two weeks. As such schools are advised to accept certificates referring to periods of two weeks or less.

There may be circumstances where a principal may accept a medical certificate for longer than 2 weeks. If, for example, the certificate relates to a broken arm, the school might indicate the explanation will be accepted to support a justified absence for a period of a month, after which the school will require a new certificate in order to support any further absence being considered as justified. On the other hand, if the condition referred is influenza or a common cold the school could justifiably request a new certificate in two weeks.

In this period of COVID-19, if a medical certificate indicates that a student will be absent from school for an extended period of time, principals are advised to meet with the family and develop a return to school plan that may be informed by health care plan based on individual student needs. A COVID-19 Action Plan may also be referred to as part of the planning.

What do I do if I receive a medical certificate citing a respiratory condition or asthma where the student has no previous history?

In order to best meet a student's learning, welfare and wellbeing needs a school may, at any time, request further and better information relating to a current medical diagnosis. This may involve asking parents for copies of medical specialist reports, particularly if there is a paediatrician treating the student. Parents can also be asked to give consent for the school to contact a medical practitioner directly to involve them in planning for the student's return to school. Again, a medical certificate by a GP need only be accepted by the school for a reasonable length of time in the absence of specialist medical support.

What do I do if I receive a medical certificate and the student has a history of non-attending without explanation?

The school policies and procedures around dealing with students with a history of poor school attendance applies in this situation. In most cases schools will have already started implementing intervention strategies to support the student and family to improve attendance.

In cases where medical certificates are provided for students with a long history of poor attendance, the school is able to indicate that they wish to discuss the medical condition with the doctor who issued the certificate in order to fully ascertain the nuances of the condition and establish a plan to facilitate the child's continuing education.

In such cases schools may ask parents to sign a consent form allowing the doctor to discuss these matters with a representative from the school. Should the parent not be willing to sign such a consent form the school may indicate to the parent that any future medical certificates will not be accepted as an explanation of the condition and the absences will be recorded as unjustified.

 If needed, principals can contact the AISNSW Student Services Portfolio for assistance with planning and intervention strategies to support an individual student's return to school

What do I do during this current COVID-19 period if I receive a medical certificate relating to a family member of a student living in the same household?

When communicating with families, reference should be made to the current NSW Health advice on the risks of contracting COVID-19.

In cases where a student is residing with a family member in one of the categories identified as being at increased risk by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), students should attend school unless a medical practitioner explicitly advises otherwise.

Written confirmation should be provided from the treating medical practitioner stating the student is unable to attend school face-to-face.

The principal has the discretion to accept or reject a medical certificate.

How can I best support students with disability in returning to face-to-face learning?

Under discrimination law, schools must take reasonable steps to ensure that a student with disability can participate in education programs on the same basis as a student without disability, and without experiencing discrimination. This does not mean all students are treated the same.

Schools should be flexible in managing the return to school of students with disability, especially when medical advice confirms they are vulnerable to COVID-19 e.g. the student is immuno-suppressed.

Under the duty of care, schools must take reasonable steps to protect students from foreseeable risk of harm/do what they practically can to ensure student safety.

As part of this process, schools will need to continue making reasonable adjustments for students with disability to enable their return to school, while minimising their risk of infection.

It is essential to consult with the student's parents or carers and, where practicable, the student when considering reasonable adjustments. If it has been determined a student should not be consulted as part of this process, this should be regularly reassessed as a student's capacity to participate in this process may change over time.

Schools may continue to be flexible in continuing to allow students with disability to continue learning from home, where there is proper medical justification. Under these circumstances schools should continue to encourage connections with these students (by staff and peers) and contact them regularly to offer support for learning from home. Schools should work closely with students with disability, where practicable, and their families, to continue monitoring risks and making reasonable adjustments as the need arises.

Census 2022 and COVID Absences

The 2022 Census guidelines provide clarification that to be eligible to be reported in this year's census a student must have physically attended the school for at least one day during the census reference period. Where a school has a student(s) who have not been able to physically attend school during the census period, the school can submit a Special Circumstances application for the student provided they meet the other Census eligibility requirements. This includes students who were required to learn from home due to COVID-19 related reasons and were counted as attending school through a 'variation to attendance' using the attendance code 'F'.

Schools are advised to double-check their census data prior to completing their Census Declaration by 12 August 2022.

Where a Special Circumstances application is made, supporting documentation must be submitted, such as medical documentation, attendance records and evidence to demonstrate student participation in learning.

More information about Special Circumstances applications and suggested supporting documentation can be found on SchoolsHUB.

Special Circumstances applications for 2022 must be emailed to schools@dese.gov.au by Friday 19th August 2022.

APPROVED EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

What is the process for positive cases in early childhood services?

The latest NSW Government COVID-19 advice for early childhood services can be found here.

If you're notified of a positive case in your approved early childhood service, you should follow the steps outlined on the NSW Government website for managing COVID cases in early childhood services which includes:

- Notifying ACECQA via NQA ITS within 7 days

- Determining the infectious period of the positive case and who was in attendance with the case during their infectious period then notifying those individuals using the template letter found here.

- Undertake a thorough clean of your service.

What are the mask requirements for early childhood staff?

In line with the changes to mask wearing requirements in schools, masks are no longer mandatory for staff in early childhood settings. More information about masks is found here.

Symptomatic testing for early childhood staff

Approved early learning services should receive an automatic delivery of 1 RAHT multipack for every staff member (not students) to use for symptomatic testing by COB 10 August 2022. These RAHT kits can be used for symptomatic testing or for daily testing as part of the close contact requirements.

What are the requirements for early childhood staff identified as household contacts?

The requirements for early childhood staff identified as household contacts is the same as for school staff. More information about requirements for staff identified as household contacts is found here.