ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS IN MANAGING THE RISK OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) TRANSMISSION IN SCHOOL BOARDING PREMISES

Who does this advice apply to?

The advice in this fact sheet has been developed for schools or entities that operate school boarding premises (also referred to as facilities in this document).

It does not apply to university accommodation settings.

How should schools plan to minimise the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission in school boarding premises?

Each school boarding premises is different and will face different issues and challenges in minimising the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19).

All school boarding premises should follow the *Health and safety advice for return to onsite schooling in the context of coronavirus (COVID-19)*.

In addition, school boarding premises **must undertake a specific systematic risk assessment and mitigation process** to manage the risk specific to that facility.

What should school boarding premises consider when undertaking risk assessments?

The risk assessment should include, but is not limited to, a consideration of:

- accommodation and sleeping arrangements
- hygiene facilities
- catering processes
- mealtimes and processes
- class times
- classroom procedure interface with dormitory procedures
- study requirements
- control of entry and exit to the site
- process for and records relating to visitors
- off campus visits
- school policy and possible gaps
- teachers and staff most at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (in line with other members of the community, teachers and staff may be at greater risk of more serious illness if they are infected with coronavirus (COVID-19) if they are: aged 70 years and over; aged 65 years and over and have chronic medical conditions; of any age and have a compromised immune system; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and are aged over 50 with chronic medical conditions)

- cleaning regimens

- education and training for coronavirus (COVID-19)

- use of indoor/outdoor recreation areas

- laundry areas and other ancillary areas

- the mental health of students.

The Department of Education and Training has developed risk assessment and mitigation planning advice to accompany this fact sheet that school boarding premises may use to assist in undertaking the assessment **[insert hyperlink]**.

How should school boarding premises use risk assessments to develop strategies to mitigate the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Building on the risk assessment undertaken, school boarding premises need to develop comprehensive risk management plans to minimise the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19). School boarding premises should develop mitigation strategies that ensure risks identified during the risk assessment process are managed as far as reasonably practicable.

Risk management plans should include:

- scenario planning for single and multiple confirmed cases and/or close contacts, where the school boarding premises remains open

- scenario planning for single and multiple confirmed cases and/or close contacts, where the school boarding premises needs to temporarily close

- details of mitigation strategies that ensure the risks identified during the risk assessment process are managed as far as reasonably practicable, including through meeting the current recommendations for physical distancing as well as infection prevention and control.

- the development of individual actions plans for each student and staff member, determined in advance, outlining what will happen if they become a confirmed case, suspected case of close contact. Individual action plans should include:

  o details of where students will spend their isolation or quarantine period

  o if the isolation or quarantine period is not at the school boarding premises, details of how students will travel there

  o consideration of the practicality of a return home for the period of required isolation or quarantine

  o local arrangements for students from a rural or remote community where it may be impractical or undesirable to return home for isolation or quarantine (for example, if there is insufficient health infrastructure support in the student's home environment, or if the student would be returning to a vulnerable community whilst infectious).

Risk management plans should also include working closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in the event of multiple cases in the facility.

Facilities should continue to refer to current DHHS coronavirus (COVID-19) health advice and adjust procedures and protocols as required.

What strategies should school boarding premises consider to limit the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) in facilities?

School boarding premises should focus on the following strategies:

1. Reducing the number of students staying at the facility

Whilst the means of achieving this rests with the school boarding premises, potential options could include:

- boarders whose primary place of residence is close to the school staying home and attending as day students

- giving priority to specific student groups for boarding (such as Year 11 and 12 students, or students living in isolated rural or remote areas)

- arranging alternative supervised accommodation in smaller groups (for example, households of 3-4 students)

- supporting families to arrange alternative lodging with other families, with appropriate actions to support student safety.

2. Meeting the current recommendations for physical distancing, as well as infection prevention and control

As noted in _Health and safety advice for return to onsite schooling in the context of coronavirus (COVID-19)_, maintaining a physical distance of 1.5 metres will not always be practical in education settings. Physical distancing is most important between adults. Reducing mixing between different cohorts (either classes or year levels) is recommended as a precautionary measure to minimise the risk of transmission. These principles also apply to school boarding premises.

School boarding premises should consider as appropriate:

- displaying clear signage about physical distancing guidelines (for teachers and staff) and coronavirus (COVID-19) health and safety advice to re-enforce these parameters and protocols throughout a facility

- limiting visitors to the facility to:
    - those providing an essential service (e.g. health service, catering deliveries, cleaning service, laundry collection)
    - parents, guardians, relatives and others who may be providing care or support to students or staff at a school boarding premises, where necessary.

- establishing appropriate processes to assess that boarders, staff and essential visitors are well and not symptomatic

- limiting out-of-facility visits to those permitted under the Stay Safe directions to reduce risk of virus introduction into the facility

- reducing risk of adult-to-adult transmission by ensuring all staff maintain 1.5m physical distance from other adults (especially in common spaces like staff rooms)

- reducing risk of transmission by revising sleeping arrangements:
    - single rooms for sleeping are preferred in order to limit potential transmission
    - where single rooms are not available, school boarding premises should consider cohorting students who are also together in class/sport within a dormitory.

- minimising use of shared bathrooms:
    - bathrooms and toilets for individual use should be used where available

- o if shared, additional cleaning and hygiene measures should be implemented.
- reducing mixing between different cohorts of boarders in the facility, for example by:
    - o staggering dining times in shared dining rooms to reduce group numbers and cleaning between dining sessions
    - o allocating boarders to specific shared communal facilities, such as bathrooms, toilets and recreation areas.
- conducting routine extended cleaning of school boarding premises, encouraging regular hand hygiene for all staff and students, particularly before and after eating, after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the toilet.
    - o where soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitiser should be provided in every occupied room.
- implementing appropriate infection prevention and control at facility health clinics/infirmaries – including normal PPE use as appropriate for tasks performed (i.e.that are used in the normal conduct of performing regular duties).

3. Identifying and managing suspected and confirmed cases

School boarding premises should establish arrangements to identify and isolate suspected or confirmed cases as required. These arrangements could include:

- conducting daily screening using a questionnaire to aid early identification of symptomatic students, staff and visitors
- there is no need for facilities to conduct wide-scale temperature checking as there is limited evidence to demonstrate the value of such checks.
- seeking advice from the student's family doctor or the medical practice providing GP services to the facility to arrange testing of symptomatic students
- symptomatic staff should not attend work and be encouraged to seek medical advice about testing
- isolating a suspected case until the test result is known. Follow current advice from the Department of Health and Human Services: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) suspected case: What you need to know
- establishing processes and procedures for isolating any cases that arise, including development of individual action plans determined in advance for each student/staff member outlining what will happen if they become a case or a close contact, where they will spend their isolation period, how will they get there, etc.
    - o individual action plans should consider the practicality to return home for the period of required isolation; or local arrangements for students from a rural or remote community where it may be impractical to return home or may be undesirable (for example, if there is insufficient health infrastructure support in the student's home environment, or if the student would be returning to a vulnerable community whilst infectious).
- activating the action plan for this student/staff member so that if they are a confirmed case they can be relocated safely and efficiently. If a confirmed case is to remain in the school boarding premises, isolation at the facility must meet expected criteria for any case in the community. Follow current advice from the Department of Health and Human Services: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) confirmed case: What you need to know.

4. Identification and management of close contacts

There are challenges in identifying specific close contacts within a school boarding premises unless measures to reduce mixing between different cohorts of boarders are implemented and adhered to.

Due to high density and close living arrangements, the numbers of students and staff defined as close contacts could be large, such as all who lived in a shared space such as a dormitory.

School boarding premises should establish processes and procedures for quarantine of any identified close contacts, considering the practicality to return home for the period of quarantine, including the development of individual action plans.

Quarantine at school boarding premises must meet the expected criteria for any close contact in the community. Follow current advice from the Department of Health and Human Services: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) close contact: What you need to know.

How should school boarding premises involve parents in decision making?

Decisions for students to return to facilities should be a shared decision that involves the parents/guardians of students. The school boarding premises should ensure that there is a clear understanding, with a documented agreement around the issues raised above and the facility's proposed risk management plans. The documentation provided to the parents/guardians should include the agreed individual action plan for the student outlining what will happen if they become a case or a close contact, where they will spend their isolation period, how will they get there, etc.