# CORONAVIRUS: school closure – reactive comms pack

Response to confirmed case with COVID-19

## Introduction

This pack contains template communications to support schools in the event of a school closure due to a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) within the school community.

If a member of the school community (staff or student) has tested positive to coronavirus (COVID-19), the school may be closed, for 24 hours initially, to allow time for staff from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to carry out contact tracing (to identify any staff and students who have been in contact with the confirmed case) and take necessary steps to contain and slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

This communications pack should only be used for the purposes of communicating with families in the event of a school closure.

The decision to close a school will be made on the recommendation of DHHS. Once this occurs, DHHS will inform the Department of Education and Training, which will work with the school to implement the closure.

## Contents

This pack contains communications resources to support schools in communicating with their communities in the event that the school is required to close due to coronavirus (COVID-19). Communications collateral includes:

**24-hour initial closure communications**:

* Letter to parents and carers (confirming case and closure)
* Letter to staff
* Media statement
* Q&As on a school closure

**Longer-term closure communications:**

* Letter to parents and carers
* Letter to staff
* Media statement

**Contact communications:**

* Letter to parents/carers of students confirmed by DHHS as close contact
* Letter to staff confirmed by DHHS as close contact
* Letter to all parents/carers and staff on completion of contact tracing

# 24-HOUR COMMUNICATIONS

## Letter to PARENTS AND CARERS (CONFIRMING CASE AND CLOSURE)

Dear parents and carers,

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has confirmed that a **[STUDENT/STAFF MEMBER]** at **[SCHOOL]** has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

Following advice from DHHS and the Department of Education and Training, **[SCHOOL]** will be closed for **[ALL STUDENTS/ALL STUDENTS CURRENTLY LEARNING ONSITE]** from **[DATE]** for 24 hours initially.

This closure will allow time for the school and DHHS to work through a contact and containment strategy.

This includes identifying and notifying any person who has been in close recent contact with the affected **[STUDENT/STAFF MEMBER]** who has tested positive to coronavirus (COVID-19). Affected students, their families and school staff will be notified by DHHS over the next 24 hours and supported to ensure they understand what actions to take.

**[ALL STUDENTS/ALL STUDENTS CURRENTLY LEARNING ONSITE]** are advised to remain at home while contact tracing occurs. They must limit movements to home-based activities and not attend public places.

I understand this news will be concerning for many of you. I want to assure you we are doing everything we can to contain and slow the spread of the virus and ensure the health and safety of our whole school community.

The school is being supported by both the health and education departments regarding our next steps and appropriate action.

The school will update all families once the contact tracing has been completed and a decision about reopening the school facilities for students is made. We will continue to keep you informed as further updates become available.

More information regarding coronavirus and schools is available on the [DET website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx).

Yours sincerely,

**[NAME]
Principal
[SCHOOL]**

## Letter to STAFF

Dear staff,

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has confirmed that a **[STUDENT/STAFF MEMBER]** at **[SCHOOL]** has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

Following advice from DHHS and the Department of Education and Training, **[SCHOOL]** will be closed for all staff from **[DATE]** for 24 hours initially.

This closure will allow time for the school and DHHS to work through a contact and containment strategy.

This includes identifying and notifying any person who has been in close recent contact with the affected **[STUDENT/STAFF MEMBER]** who has tested positive to coronavirus (COVID-19). Affected students, their families and school staff will be notified by DHHS over the next 24 hours and supported to ensure they understand what actions to take.

All staff are advised to remain at home while this occurs. You must limit your movements to home-based activities and not attend public places.

I understand this news will be concerning for many of you. I want to assure you we are doing everything we can to contain and slow the spread of the virus and ensure the health and safety of our whole school community.

The school is being supported by both the health and education departments on our next steps and appropriate action.

The school will update all staff once the contact tracing has been completed and a decision about reopening the school facilities for students and staff [**who are unable to learn and work from home is made],** and we will continue to keep you informed as further updates become available.

More information regarding coronavirus and schools is available on the [DET website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx).

Yours sincerely,

**[NAME]
Principal
[SCHOOL]**

## media statement

## The Department of Health and Human Services has recommended closure of [SCHOOL] after a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection was identified in a [STAFF MEMBER/STUDENT].

## [SCHOOL] will close for all students and staff for at least 24 hours, effective [DATE], so that contact tracing can occur.

## Further investigations are being undertaken this morning by DHHS, the school and DET to identify whether any staff or students are required to self-isolate, and to determine any further actions required to reduce the risk of infection.

## q&aS ON A SCHOOL CLOSURE

**My school has been closed, why?**

Your school has been closed in the interests of public health and the safety of your school community. This decision has been made in consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services.

If a member of the school community (staff or student) has tested positive to coronavirus (COVID-19), closure of the school will allow time for staff from the Department of Health and Human Services to carry out contact tracing (to identify any staff and students who have been in contact with the confirmed case) and take necessary steps to contain and slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the community.

The Department of Health and Human Services’ recommendations for education settings take a highly precautionary approach based on the latest and best medical advice.

**How long will my school be closed for?**

The school will close initially for 24 hours, to allow time for staff from the Department of Health and Human Services to carry out contact tracing.

Following this, the length of time a school may be closed will be decided on a case-by-case basis on the expert advice of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The decision to re-open a school will be made when experts deem it safe to do so.

**My school has been closed, are my staff/students at risk?**

The health and safety of school communities is paramount and the steps recommended for your school by the Department of Health and Human Services take a highly precautionary approach based on the latest and best medical advice.

Department of Health and Human Services officials will work through a contact and containment strategy to contain and slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the community.

This includes identifying and notifying any person who has been in close recent contact with the affected student/staff member who has tested positive to coronavirus (COVID-19).

Affected students, their families and school staff will be supported to ensure they understand what actions to take and receive appropriate medical support where required.

**What is a ‘close contact’?**

The spread of coronavirus disease occurs through close contact with an infected person, mostly face-to-face or within a household.

A close contact is someone who has been face-to-face for greater than 15 minutes or shared a closed space for more than two hours with a person who has tested positive to coronavirus (COVID-19) when that person was infectious.

A close contact could include any person meeting any of the following criteria:

* living in the same household or household-like setting (for example, a boarding school)
* direct contact with the body fluids of a confirmed case
* a person who spent two hours or longer in the same room
* face-to-face contact for more than 15 minutes with the case in any other setting not listed above.

The Department of Health and Human Services will work with your school to identify and notify any staff and students identified as having been in close contact with the confirmed case, providing further advice as required.

**My school has been closed, are staff/students required to self-isolate?**

In the first 24 hours, students and staff are asked to remain at home while the Department of Health and Human Services undertakes contact tracing. This includes limiting movements to home-based activities and not attending public places.

The Department of Health and Human Services will work with your school to identify and notify any staff and students identified as having been in close contact with the person who has tested positive to coronavirus (COVID-19), providing further advice as required.

*Close contacts*

If a staff member or student is identified by the Department of Health and Human Services as being a close contact of the confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19), they will be required to self-isolate at home and not return to school for 14 days from last contact.

Refer to [guidance on self-isolation](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-isolation-guidance) from the Commonwealth Government.

[Further information](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19) from the Department of Health and Human Services for close contacts can be found under the Factsheets for patients tab.

During this period, if a staff member or student starts to experience symptoms associated with coronavirus (COVID-19) such as fever, shortness of breath, cough, sore throat, fatigue or tiredness they should:

* see a doctor (calling ahead before visiting)
* inform the school.

Once well again, they can return to school.

*Not identified as a close contact*

Do not need to self-isolate and can return to school as soon as it reopens.

**My school has been closed, should all students/staff be tested for COVID-19?**

People who are well should not be tested for coronavirus (COVID-19). There is no need for students or staff to be tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) unless they are advised to do so by the Department of Health and Human Services.

**My school has been closed, should members of staff and student’s households self-isolate? (including staff and students attending other educational settings)**

There is no need for members of a household to self-isolate, unless identified as a close contact of a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) or advised to do so by the Department of Health and Human Services.

All members of a household should be encouraged to:

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

**My school has been closed. Can school-based activities, such as outside school hours care (OSHC) or a school holiday program still go ahead?**

In the first instance, no school-based activities should continue until advised otherwise by the Department of Health and Human Services.

The scope of the school closure will be decided on a case-by-case basis on the expert advice of the Department of Health and Human Services.

**My school has just reopened, are my staff/students at risk?**

The Department of Health and Human Services’ recommendations for education settings take a highly precautionary approach based on the latest and best medical advice.

The decision to re-open a school will be made when it is deemed by the experts to be safe to do so.

# LONGER-TERM CLOSURE COMMUNICATIONS

## Letter to PARENTS AND CARERS

Dear parents and carers,

I’m writing to update you on my email yesterday regarding a **[STAFF MEMBER/STUDENT]** at **[SCHOOL]** testing positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

**Update on school closure**

Following advice from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education and Training (DET), **[SCHOOL]** will remain closed for **[ALL STUDENTS/ALL STUDENTS CURRENTLY LEARNING ONSITE]** for **[XX DAYS / UNTIL XX DAY]**.

**[INSERT RATIONALE**, *SUCH AS: This is a highly precautionary decision by DHHS based on analysis of this case. By closing the school for XX days, we are aiming to minimise any further spread of the virus in our school community***]**.

This will allow infectious cleaning of the school site to occur on the recommendation of DHHS. Once cleaning has been completed, DHHS has advised the school site can reopen.

The school and DHHS are continuing to work through a contact and containment strategy.

This includes identifying and notifying any person who has been in close recent contact with the affected **[STAFF MEMBER/STUDENT].** Affected students, their families and school staff will be notified and supported to ensure they understand what actions to take.

All students are advised to remain at home until contact tracing is completed and you are advised if further action is required.

**Ensuring continuity of learning**

The school is well prepared to **[RESUME / CONTINUE**] its remote learning programs. We will run structured online teaching sessions with students, and students and parents will also be able to contact teachers online via Compass.

**Next steps**

I understand this news will be concerning for many of you. I want to assure you we are doing everything we can to contain and slow the spread of the virus and ensure the health and safety of our whole school community.

The school is being supported by both DHHS and DET on our next steps and appropriate action. We will continue to keep you informed as further updates become available.

More information regarding coronavirus and schools is available on the [DET website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx).

Yours sincerely,

**[NAME]
Principal
[SCHOOL]**

## Letter to staff

Dear staff,

I’m writing to update you on my email yesterday regarding a **[STAFF MEMBER/STUDENT]** at **[SCHOOL]** testing positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

**Update on school closure**

Following advice from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education and Training (DET), **[SCHOOL]** will remain closed for all staff **[XX DAYS / UNTIL XX DAY]**.

**[INSERT RATIONALE,** *SUCH AS: This is a highly precautionary decision by DHHS based on the unique circumstances of the staff member’s interaction with the school community. By closing the school for XX days, we are aiming to minimise any further spread of the virus in our school community.***]**

This will allow infectious cleaning of the school site to occur on the recommendation of DHHS. Once cleaning has been completed, DHHS has advised the school site can reopen.

The school and DHHS are continuing to work through a contact and containment strategy.

This includes identifying and notifying any person who has been in close recent contact with the affected **[STAFF MEMBER/STUDENT].** Affected students, their families and school staff will be notified and supported to ensure they understand what actions to take.

All staff are advised to remain at home until contact tracing is completed and you are advised if further action is required.

**Supporting our students**

Staff are expected to continue to carry out duties related to teaching and learning **[during normal school hours through the school’s remote learning program.]**

We have established online learning platforms so that students have ongoing access to the literacy, numeracy and inquiry curriculums. Regular interaction, feedback and task allocation with each student in your class is essential throughout this period.

**Working from home**

Below are four tips to help you transition to working from home:

* Maintain your normal work routines, where possible.
* Take the time and make the effort to set up your home workstation properly – and be comfortable.
* Keep in contact with your colleagues for professional and personal support during this time.
* Know when it’s time to stop; take care of your wellbeing and stay in touch with family and friends.

**Next steps**

I understand this news will be concerning for many of you. I want to assure you we are doing everything we can to contain and slow the spread of the virus and ensure the health and safety of our whole school community.

The school is being supported by the DHHS Chief Health Officer and DET on our next steps and appropriate action. We will continue to keep you informed as further updates become available.

More information regarding coronavirus and schools is available on the [DET website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx).

Yours sincerely,

**[NAME]
Principal
[SCHOOL]**

## Media statement

The Department of Health and Human Services recommended the closure of **[SCHOOL]** for **[LENGTH]** days for all students and staff, as a precaution following confirmation that a **[STAFF MEMBER/STUDENT]** at the school has testing positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

The health and safety of students and staff is our absolute priority.

The school is well prepared to **[RESUME / CONTINUE** delivering its remote learning program for all students.

Teachers are already running structured online teaching sessions with students, and students and parents are also be able to contact teachers online via Compass.

**Background**

DET and DHHS are working closely with **[SCHOOL]** and supporting the school with the latest advice about coronavirus and appropriate action.

The Department has supported schools in preparing both online and offline education materials that can be completed by students at home.

The school will be able to use the new, dedicated online website, Learning From Home, which has been developed in response to the outbreak.

# CONTACT COMMUNICATIONS

## FOLLOW-UP Letter oN DHHS ADVICE – FAMILIES OF students (CLOSE contact)

Dear parent or carer,

As you’re aware, following the notification of a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19), our school has been working closely with the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health and Human Services, with the health and safety of all students, staff and the school community front of mind.

The Department of Health and Human Services has identified that your child has had close contact with a **[STUDENT/STAFF MEMBER]** who was recently diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19).

Your child should self-isolate at home and, **[IF THEY ARE CURRENTLY ATTENDING SCHOOL]**, should not return to school until **[DATE]**, which is 14 days from the day of last contact with the confirmed case.

During this period, the school will **[RESUME / CONTINUE]** its remote learning program. If you need assistance with this or have any questions about remote learning, please contact us.

If your child develops any symptoms such as a fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath:

* Seek medical advice (call ahead to alert your doctor to the contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 and your child’s symptoms before visiting, and take this letter along)
* Call the school to let us know.

Once your child is well again, and it is after **[DATE],** they can return to school.

If your child has a health condition or complex health needs, please discuss this with your medical specialist.

More information about coronavirus (COVID-19) is available on the [DHHS website](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19).

Yours sincerely,

**[NAME]
Principal
[SCHOOL]**

## FOLLOW-UP Letter – STAFF (CLOSE contact)

Dear **[NAME]**,

As you’re aware, following the notification of a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19), our school has been working closely with the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Health and Human Services, with the health and safety of all students, staff and the school community front of mind.

The Department of Health and Human Services has identified that you have had close contact with the **[STUDENT/STAFF MEMBER]** who was recently diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19).

You should remain at home and not return to school until **[DATE]**, which is 14 days from the day of last contact with the confirmed case.

If you develop any symptoms such as a fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath:

* Seek medical advice (call ahead to alert your doctor to the contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) and your child’s symptoms before visiting, and take this letter along)
* Call the school to let us know

Once you are well again, and it is after [**DATE**], you can return to school.

If you have a health condition or complex health needs, please discuss this with your medical specialist.

More information about coronavirus (COVID-19) is available on the [DHHS website](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19).

Yours sincerely,

**[NAME]
Principal
[SCHOOL]**

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## FOLLOW-UP Letter TO ALL PARENTS/CARERS AND STAFF ON COMPLETION OF CONTACT TRACING

Dear parents and carers,

I’m writing to update you regarding a [**STAFF MEMBER/STUDENT**] at **[SCHOOL]** testing positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

I’d like to thank the entire school community at the outset for your patience and understanding during this difficult time.

I want to reassure you that we are working closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education and Training (DET) to ensure you receive the best and most timely advice possible, and that the wellbeing of our students and staff is paramount.

DHHS staff have now completed the thorough investigation they needed to do to ascertain the next steps for our school. As part of this detailed process, this included identifying people who have potentially come into close contact with the **[STAFF MEMBER/STUDENT]**.

DHHS has provided direct and specific advice to these individuals and their families about self-isolating and looking after themselves.

All other members of the school community who have not been contacted by DHHS are not identified as close contacts and therefore are deemed very low risk, so will be able to go to school as soon as it reopens.

It is important that we all continue to monitor our own and the health of our children daily during this time.

If you or your child develops any symptoms such as a fever, cough, sore throat or shortness of breath:

* Stay at home and do not attend school
* Seek medical advice (call ahead to alert your doctor about the confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) at the school and any symptoms before visiting, and take this letter along)
* Call the school to let us know

If you or your child have a health condition or complex health needs, please discuss this with your medical specialist.

More information about coronavirus (COVID-19) is available on the [DHHS website](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19).

I am proud to belong to such a caring and supportive school community and I thank you for your understanding at this challenging time.

The school will continue to work closely with both DET and DHHS during this time, and we wish the affected **[STAFF MEMBER/STUDENT]** a speedy and safe recovery.

Yours sincerely,

**[NAME]
Principal
[SCHOOL]**