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

Last updated 10 August 2020

1. Updated restrictions in metropolitan Melbourne and rural and regional Victoria

On 2 August the Premier announced that Victoria has entered a State of Disaster until at least 13 September, with Stage 4 restrictions applied in metropolitan Melbourne and Stage 3 restrictions applied in regional Victoria. This advice has been updated to support school boarding premises throughout the State of Disaster and will be reviewed and updated as needed.

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

Where school boarding premises continue to operate and have students in attendance, they must follow the COVID-19 transmission reduction strategies outlined in this document, in addition to *Health and safety advice for on-site schooling in the context of coronavirus (COVID-19)* and the Chief Health Officer's Workplace Directions.

School boarding premises **must undertake and continue to review a specific systematic risk assessment and mitigation process** to manage the risk specific to that facility, including risk to boarders and staff. Where possible, risk mitigation should include a focus on minimising the number of residents at a school boarding premises.

It is recommended that any risk assessment completed prior to the State of Disaster being announced be immediately reviewed, taking into consideration the new Workplace Directions and the strong recommendation that all students who can practically and safely return home should do so.

2. Audience of this advice

The advice in this fact sheet has been developed by the Department of Education and Training (the Department) for schools or entities that operate school boarding premises (also referred to as 'facilities' in this document).

This advice does not apply to university accommodation settings.

3. Attendance at school boarding premises

School boarding premises should seek to minimise the number of students in attendance at their facility. It is strongly recommended that all students residing at school boarding premises who can safely and practically return to their family home should do so.

When determining whether it is appropriate for a student to return home, school boarding schools should consult with students' families and consider:

- Whether it is logistically possible for the student to return home (considering any state border closures and quarantine requirements)
- The mental health and wellbeing of the student
- Whether a return home increases the risk to the student or their family of COVID-19
- Any additional vulnerabilities that a student may have.

Where it is not possible, practical or safe for students to return home (for example for international students, or students interstate where it is not possible for parents to quarantine with their child), school boarding premises should continue to operate with health and safety precautions in place.

All students residing at school boarding premises should learn remotely until at least 13 September. This is in accordance with the Premier's announcement on 2 August that schools across Victoria will transition to remote learning from 5 August until at least September 13.

4. Workplace Directions and COVIDSafe Plans

Workplaces that are permitted to remain open in Victoria are subject to the Chief Health Officer's Workplace Directions, which place specific requirements on permitted workplaces, including for employers and employees). These include preventative measures that must be taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, but also steps that must be taken by employers if they are made aware of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 who attended the workplace whilst infectious.

Certain workplaces are required by law to have a COVIDSafe Plan depending on the type of workplace or where they are located- see Workplace Directions and Workplace (Additional Industry Obligations) Directions for more detail. Even where not legally enforceable, it is still strongly recommended that a COVIDSafe Plan be in place at each workplace. COVIDSafe Plans are in addition to the risk assessment for boarders referred to in this document.

COVIDSafe Plans are intended to help workplaces to protect their staff and visitors to prevent and prepare for a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the workplace.

COVIDSafe Plans must set out:

- The actions of school boarding premises to help prevent the introduction of COVID-19 in the workplace
- The level of face-covering or personal protective equipment (PPE) required for the school boarding premises workforce
- How school boarding premises will prepare for, and respond to, a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the workplace.

COVIDSafe Plans must demonstrate how school boarding premises will meet all of the requirements set out by the Victorian Government. Some higher-risk industries or workplaces have additional requirements of employers and employees.

More information on COVIDSafe Plans can be found on the Business Victoria website.

The requirement for school boarding premises to complete COVIDSafe Plans is in addition to the requirement for associated schools.

It is recommended that any COVIDSafe plans completed prior to the State of Disaster being announced be immediately reviewed, taking into consideration the new Workplace Directions and the strong recommendation that all students who can practically and safely return home should do so.

5. Minimising the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission in school boarding premises

The risk assessments undertaken by school boarding premises should include, but not be limited to, a consideration of the following factors. The Department has developed risk assessment and mitigation planning template to accompany this fact sheet that school boarding premises may use to assist in undertaking the assessment. Consideration of these factors may also assist school boarding premises in completing their COVIDSafe Plans.

A. Attendance of and transmission reduction strategies for boarders

It is strongly recommended that all students who can practically and safely return home to their families during the State of Disaster should do so. (See Section 3: Attendance at school boarding premises)

For students who continue to reside in the school boarding premises, transmission reduction strategies should be consistently implemented. Mixing between cohorts of students should be minimised, and students should be allocated to separate sleeping quarters where possible. School boarding premises should consider:

- Establishing appropriate processes to assess that boarders are well and not symptomatic. This should include daily temperature checks.

- Revising sleeping arrangements:

    o single rooms for sleeping are preferred in order to limit potential transmission

    o where single rooms are not available, school boarding premises should consider grouping students who are together in class within a dormitory.

- Minimising use of shared bathrooms:

    o 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

    o establishing defined remote learning areas for different cohorts of boarders.

- Encouraging regular hand hygiene for all 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, ensuring that hand sanitiser is available in every occupied room.

- Adhering to the following principles regarding the use of face coverings by students:

    o face coverings must be worn by students who are 12 years and over if there is any chance they will be interacting with staff or students they do not live with, irrespective of if this is in or out of school hours, unless a lawful exception applies. Examples of such interaction include interaction with staff who attend the boarding school to supervise remote learning but do not live there, or interaction with other students who live in separate quarters.

    o if students are only interacting with other students and staff whom they share residential quarters with, they do not need to wear face coverings in recognition that this is like being in their own home.

- Establishing circumstances under which boarders will be able to temporarily leave the site where necessary (for example for a medical appointment) and processes to support any visits.

- Delivering education and training for boarders on COVID-19 and transmission reduction strategies, including:

    o displaying clear signage about transmission reduction strategies throughout the school boarding premises, including in all communal areas, to re-enforce these

parameters and protocols. Where appropriate, school boarding premises should consider providing this signage in languages other than English.

- Ensuring the availability of mental health and wellbeing supports.

B. Attendance of and transmission reduction strategies for staff

School boarding premises should consider the following factors to reduce the risk of COVID-19 to staff. These factors are for consideration **in addition to** the requirements of the Workplace Directions and the school boarding premises' COVIDSafe Plan.

- Establishing appropriate processes to assess that staff are well and not symptomatic.

- Delivering education and training for staff on COVID-19 and transmission reduction strategies, including:

  o displaying clear signage about transmission reduction strategies throughout the school boarding premises, including in all communal areas and staff areas, to re-enforce these parameters and protocols

- Delivering education and training for staff, where relevant, on the appropriate use of PPE when managing someone displaying symptoms of COVID-19. The Department has provided schools with guidance on the use of PPE.

- Reinforcing that physical distancing is required between adults, including by emphasising the 1.5 metre rule

- Adhering to the following principles regarding the use of face coverings by staff, consistent with the principles that apply for students:

  o face coverings must be worn by staff if there is any chance they will be interacting with staff or students they do not live with, irrespective of if this is in or out of school hours, unless a lawful exception applies. Examples of such interaction include interaction with staff who attend the boarding school to supervise remote learning but do not live there, or interaction with students who live in separate quarters.

  o if staff are only interacting with students and staff whom they share residential quarters with, they do not need to wear face coverings in recognition that this is like being in their own home.

- Where staff reside at school boarding premises:

  o single rooms for sleeping are preferred in order to limit potential transmission

  o bathrooms and toilets for individual use should be used where available

  o if shared, additional cleaning and hygiene measures should be implemented.

- Encouraging regular hand hygiene for all staff, particularly before and after eating, after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the toilet

  o where soap and water are not readily available, ensuring that hand sanitiser is available in every occupied room, including staff-only areas.

- Staff who are medically vulnerable should seek advice from their medical practitioner in relation to their on-site attendance. 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 COVID-19 if they are:

  o aged 70 years and over

  o aged 65 years and over and have chronic medical conditions

  o of any age and have a compromised immune system

4

- o Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and are aged over 50 with chronic medical conditions.

-

C. Facility management

Refer to Workplace Directions for specific obligations on employers that may be relevant to facility management.

School boarding premises must consider safety and transmission reduction strategies related to the management of their facility, including:

- Conducting routine extended cleaning of school boarding premises

- Ensuring the provision of adequate hygiene facilities and supplies, including soap and hand sanitizer

- Considering catering and mealtime processes

- Considering use of indoor/outdoor recreation areas, including reducing mixing between cohorts of students

- Considering use of laundry areas and other ancillary areas

- Establishing process for the control of entry and exit to the site

- Establishing processes for and records of visitors who are present for 15 minutes or more

- Limiting visitors to the facility to:

  - o those providing an essential service (e.g. health service, catering deliveries, cleaning service, laundry collection)

  - o parents, guardians, relatives and others who may be providing care or support to students or staff at a school boarding premises, where necessary.

- Limiting out-of-facility visits to those permitted under Stage 4 restrictions in metropolitan Melbourne and Stage 3 restrictions in rural and regional Victoria.

- Implementing appropriate infection prevention and control at facility health clinics/infirmaries, including appropriate use and supply of PPE and social distancing requirements.

D. Identification and management of suspected and confirmed cases

School boarding premises must establish arrangements to identify and isolate suspected or confirmed cases as required. School boarding premises should refer to the Workplace Directions for more detail on what employers must do in the event that an employee is a suspected or confirmed case and was at work in the 48 hours prior to developing symptoms.

These arrangements could include:

- Conducting daily screening using a questionnaire to aid early identification of symptomatic students, staff and visitors

- 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 (DHHS): 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 and staff member. (See Section 7: Developing individual actions plans for students and staff)

- Immediately activating the action plan for any student and staff member who becomes a suspected or confirmed case. Any isolation at the facility must meet expected criteria for any case in the community. Follow current advice from DHHS: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) confirmed case: What you need to know.

E. 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. If there is a large number of confirmed cases or close contacts at a school boarding premises, this could result in the facility needing to temporarily close.

School boarding premises must establish processes and procedures for quarantine of any identified close contacts, 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 DHHS: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) close contact: What you need to know.

School boarding premises should refer to the Workplace Directions for specific steps that employers must take in the event that a staff member tests positive and was at work whilst infectious, including contact tracing.

F. The Chief Health Officer's Workplace Directions and additional requirements for employees and employers regarding suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

In line with the Chief Health Officer's Workplace Directions, there are additional specific requirements for employees if they test positive and for employers if they become aware of a staff member who is a suspected case or has tested positive.

School boarding premises and employees should refer to the Workplace Directions for full details of these requirements. (See Section 4: Workplace Directions and COVIDSafe Plans)

6. Developing and implementing risk management plans

Building on the risk assessment or review of arrangements for students, staff and facilities, school boarding premises need to develop and continue to review comprehensive risk management plans – in addition to their COVIDSafe Plan – to minimise the risk of COVID-19.

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 transmission reduction strategies 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 or close contact. (See Section 7: Developing individual actions plans for students and staff)

Risk management plans should also include working closely with DHHS in the event of multiple cases in the facility.

School boarding premises should continue to refer to current DHHS [COVID-19 health advice](#) and adjust procedures and protocols as required. School boarding premises should also maintain current knowledge of requirements related to COVIDSafe Plans, and update these as required.

7. Developing individual actions plans for students and staff

School boarding premises are required to develop individual action plans for every staff and student currently attending the facility.

Individual action plans for students are required to include information on:

- Whether the student will return home during the Stage 4 (metropolitan Melbourne) and Stage 3 (rural and regional Victoria) restrictions or will continue to reside at the school boarding premises

- If a student is to return home, details of any travel arrangements or interstate quarantine requirements

- If the student is to remain at the school boarding premises, the process that will be implemented if:
    - they are a confirmed case of COVID-19
    - they are a close contact
    - where a student will spend any isolation or quarantine period
    - if the isolation or quarantine period is not at the school boarding premises, details of how students will travel there noting that the health advice is that students remain in situ unless they have health symptoms requiring a hospital admission or the facility is unable to accommodate safe isolation or quarantining.

Individual action plans for staff are required to include information on:

- Whether the staff member will continue to reside at or attend the school boarding premises during the Stage 4 (metropolitan Melbourne) and Stage 3 (rural and regional Victoria) restrictions

- If the staff member is to continue attending or residing at the school boarding premises, the process that will be implemented if:
    - they are a confirmed case of COVID-19
    - they are a close contact
    - where a staff member will spend any isolation or quarantine period
    - for staff who ordinarily reside at the school boarding premises, if the isolation or quarantine period is not at the school boarding premises, details of how the staff member will travel there noting that the health advice is that staff remain in situ unless they have health symptoms requiring a hospital admission or the facility is unable to accommodate safe isolation or quarantining.

- Any other obligations consistent with the school boarding premises' COVIDSafe Plan.

8. Involving parents in decision making

School boarding premises should consult with students' parents and carers regarding whether students should return home or remain at the school boarding premises. Discussions should include consideration of any interstate quarantine requirements.

School boarding premises should ensure that families and carers have a clear understanding, with documented agreement, of the advice for school boarding premises included in this document and the facility's proposed risk management plans.

Parents and guardians should also be consulted regarding the development of their child's individual action plan and provided with a copy of this plan.