

# **ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS IN MANAGING THE RISK OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) TRANSMISSION IN SCHOOL BOARDING PREMISES AND MEDIUM TERM RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS**

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## 1. COVIDSAFE SUMMER

The challenges posed by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic for the Victorian education community are unprecedented. Thank you to the operators of school boarding premises and medium-term residential programs (MTRPs) for your ongoing commitment to slowing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) and for supporting students and staff through this time.

[COVIDSafe Summer](#) restrictions are in place across Victoria and to support you throughout this period, the Department of Education and Training (the Department) has issued updated advice on managing the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission in school boarding premises and MTRPs.

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs should follow the advice in this document. This includes advice regarding transmission reduction strategies and management of suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19).

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs should:

- review and update as appropriate their coronavirus (COVID-19) risk assessment and mitigation plans
- review and update as appropriate individual action plans for all students and staff attending the school boarding premises and MTRPs
- review and update as appropriate their [COVIDSafe Plan](#).

School boarding premises and MTRPs should also refer to [health and safety advice for on-site schooling in the context of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

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

## 2. WHO SHOULD READ THIS ADVICE

The guidance in this fact sheet has been developed by the Department for schools or entities that operate school boarding premises and MTRPs (also referred to as ‘facilities’ in this document).

School boarding premises are defined as premises at which accommodation services are provided to students enrolled at or attending a registered school. The primary purpose is to enable or facilitate a person to enrol at or attend a registered school.

For the purposes of this advice, MTRPs are defined as programs which run for less than 12 weeks, and in which students from a registered school reside together in order to undertake core curriculum at a location away from the usual school site. Attendance is for a specific purpose, including instruction in a key learning area or to attend a specific program, for example a leadership program, sustainable living program or personal development program.

This guidance does not apply to school camps. For guidance on school camps, please refer to [coronavirus.vic.gov.au/school-camps-during-coronavirus](https://coronavirus.vic.gov.au/school-camps-during-coronavirus).

## 3. ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL BOARDING PREMISES AND MTRPs

Students in all year levels are permitted to be in attendance at school boarding premises and MTRPs across Victoria.

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs are encouraged to keep a close eye on the welfare of all attending students by ensuring that any students arriving from a different residential environment are not displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) and are not close contacts of anyone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19).

## 4. COVIDSAFE PLANS

All workplaces in Victoria are required by law to have a [COVIDSafe Plan](#) unless an exemption applies.

The COVIDSafe plan is part of the Workplace Directions which place requirements on all workplaces in Victoria with onsite operations.

COVIDSafe Plans are intended to help workplaces protect their staff, customers and visitors and to prevent and prepare for a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the workplace. More information on COVIDSafe Plans can be found at [creating a COVIDSafe workplace](#).

### **A. COVIDSafe Plans for school boarding premises**

As school boarding premises are workplaces, they are required to complete a [COVIDSafe Plan](#).

The requirement for school boarding premises to complete COVIDSafe Plans is in addition to:

- the requirement for COVIDSafe Plans completed by associated schools
- the risk assessment for boarders referred to in this document.

### **B. COVIDSafe Plans for MTRPs**

All schools must develop and maintain a COVIDSafe Plans. For schools operating MTRPs, it is recommended that schools create a separate COVIDSafe Plan for these programs.

The requirement for COVIDSafe Plans is in addition to the risk assessment for MTRPs referred to in this document.

### **C. Content of COVIDSafe Plans**

COVIDSafe Plans for school boarding premises and MTRPs must set out:

- the actions of school boarding premises and MTRPs to help prevent the introduction of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the workplace
- the level of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) required for the school boarding premises and MTRP workforce
- how school boarding premises and MTRPs 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 and schools operating MTRPs will meet all of the requirements set out by the Victorian Government.

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs should continue to review their COVIDSafe Plans, taking into account any changes to the Workplace Directions.

## **5. MINIMISING THE RISK OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) TRANSMISSION IN SCHOOL BOARDING PREMISES AND MTRPs**

New scientific research about coronavirus (COVID-19) is regularly emerging. Currently, the World Health Organization suggests that coronavirus (COVID-19) can be transmitted by contact with droplets or airborne aerosols from a person with coronavirus (COVID-19), or contaminated surfaces.

A combination of strategies is required to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). No single strategy completely reduces risk and not every measure will always be feasible and applicable to all educational settings. Where some controls are not feasible, others should be enhanced. Strategies must be adjusted over time in line with changing risk of transmission in the community and in line with public health advice.

To minimise the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission in school boarding premises and MTRPs, school boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs are required to complete a risk assessment and mitigation planning process.

The risk assessments undertaken by school boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must include, but not be limited to, a consideration of the following factors. The Department has developed a [risk assessment and mitigation planning template](#) to accompany this factsheet that school boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs may use to assist in undertaking the assessment. Consideration of these factors may also assist in the completion of COVIDSafe Plans.

### **A. Transmission reduction strategies for students**

Transmission reduction strategies must be consistently implemented for all students residing at school boarding premises and MTRPs.

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs should:

- Encourage regular hand hygiene for all students, particularly before and after eating, after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the toilet. Where soap and water are not readily available, ensure hand sanitiser is available in every occupied room.
- Preference single rooms for sleeping where available (use of dormitories is also permitted).
- Pursue a variety of strategies to support physical distancing between all students, and between students and staff. Physical distancing should be applied facility-wide, except within sleeping quarters. Staff and students should also maintain physical distance with any visitors or contractors who enter the facility.
- Hold activities outside and encourage students to eat outside, weather permitting.
- Follow the guidance on the use of face masks as outlined in [Section 5C: Principles regarding the use of face masks](#).
- Deliver education and training for students on coronavirus (COVID-19) and transmission reduction strategies, including the use of clear signage about transmission reduction strategies throughout the school boarding premises and MTRP to re-enforce parameters and protocols. Where appropriate, school boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs should consider providing this signage in languages other than English.
- Ensure that when students are in the general community they adhere to any relevant DHHS requirements, including gathering limits and face mask requirements.
- Ensure the availability of mental health and wellbeing supports.

### **B. Transmission reduction strategies for staff**

Transmission reduction strategies must be consistently implemented for all staff at school boarding premises and MTRPs, including staff who reside at the premises and staff who attend for work only. School boarding premises should:

- Deliver education and training for staff on coronavirus (COVID-19) and transmission reduction strategies, including familiarisation with the school boarding premises' or MTRP's risk assessment and COVIDSafe Plan.
- Deliver education and training for staff on the appropriate use of PPE when managing someone displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). The Department has provided schools with guidance on the use of PPE.
- Reinforce that physical distancing is required between adults, including by emphasising the 1.5 metre rule.

Apply [density restrictions](#) in staff areas, for example staff lunchrooms, and any areas accessed by visitors.

- Hold meetings outside and encouraging staff to eat outside where possible and weather permitting.
- Follow guidance on the use of face masks as outlined in [Section 5C: Principles regarding the use of face masks](#).
- Utilise single rooms for sleeping where available for staff residing on-site
- Encourage regular hand hygiene for all staff, particularly before and after eating, after blowing their nose, coughing, sneezing or using the toilet
  - where soap and water are not readily available, ensuring that hand sanitiser is available in every occupied room, including staff-only areas.
- Staff or students most at risk of severe illness as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection should continue to individually assess appropriateness for on-site attendance with support from their medical practitioner. Read more at [Advice for schools and families on medical vulnerability during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#).
- Ensure the availability of mental health and wellbeing supports.

### **C. Principles regarding the use of face masks**

#### ***School boarding premises***

- Students who reside at school boarding premises are not required to wear face masks whilst in attendance at the school boarding premises, in recognition that this is their home environment.
- All other people in attendance at school boarding premises, including staff and visitors, must wear face masks indoors. There is an exception to this for staff who reside in the school boarding premises, who may remove their face masks when they are in their sleeping quarters and not interacting with students.

#### ***Medium Term Residential Programs***

- Students attending MTRPs are not required to wear face masks whilst in their sleeping quarters.
- Students are also not required to wear face masks outside of school and instructional hours whilst within the MTRP facility (for example, at 6:00pm during recreational time) in recognition that this is their residence.
- Students aged 12 and over must wear face masks indoors whilst participating in instructional activities during the day, regardless of whether this occurs in a school environment, on the MTRP campus or elsewhere.
- All other people in attendance at MTRPs, including staff and visitors, must wear face masks indoors. This includes staff residing at MTRPs. Staff residing at MTRPs are not required to wear masks whilst in their sleeping quarters. There is also an exception to this requirement for teaching staff during the delivery of schooling instruction only.

#### ***General principles***

- Secondary school students aged 12 years and over continue to be required to wear face masks whilst indoors at school. This is consistent with the Department's [face masks advice for schools](#).
- All students aged 12 and over, staff and visitors attending school boarding premises and MTRPs must continue to follow requirements for face mask wearing whilst in the community and other environments, in accordance with [guidance from DHHS](#).
- You must wear a fitted face mask when you are in public indoor spaces unless you have a lawful reason not to.

- It is strongly recommended that you wear a face mask outdoors when you are unable to stay more than 1.5 metres from other people, such as transport stops, busy walkways and thoroughfares.
- Anyone over the age of 12 must continue to carry a face mask at all times when outside the home, unless they have a lawful reason not to. This is in case you require your face mask, for example, if you aren't able to keep 1.5 metres distance from other people.
- A fitted face mask that covers the nose and mouth is now the only permitted type of face covering. Face shields on their own do not meet these requirements.
- DHHS has identified a limited number of circumstances in which [lawful excuses or exceptions for not wearing a face mask](#) apply.
- For further information on principles regarding the use of face masks, school boarding premises should refer to the Department's [face masks advice for schools](#) and [guidance from the Victorian Government](#).

#### **D. Residential facility management**

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs should refer to the [Workplace Directions](#) for specific obligations on employers that may be relevant to residential facility management.

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs should:

- Reduce the need to interact with high touch surfaces (for example by keeping doors open, with the exception of doors to bedrooms and bathrooms).
- Ensure the provision of adequate hygiene facilities and supplies, including soap, running water and hand sanitiser.
- Conduct regular environmental cleaning of facilities, including high touch surfaces.
- Improve ventilation by:
  - increasing outdoor air ventilation whenever possible to dilute the concentration of any airborne virus and to filter air recirculating in a space
  - conducting learning outdoors where possible
  - eliminating or minimising air recirculation by setting air conditioning units to use external air rather than recycling
  - using door jams to keep air circulating and avoid the need to close and open doors (with the exception of doors to bedrooms and bathrooms).
- Establish processes for and records of visitors and contractors who are present for 15 minutes or more.
- Establish processes for and records of staff and students who are present for 15 minutes or more.
- Adhere to community restrictions including density limits for any gatherings or events at the facility or held externally but involving members of the school boarding premises or MTRP community.
- Implement appropriate infection prevention and control at residential facility health clinics/infirmarys, including appropriate use and supply of PPE and physical distancing requirements.

#### **F. Identification and management of suspected and confirmed cases**

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must establish arrangements to identify and isolate suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19).

- To respond to a suspected case, school boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must follow current advice from DHHS: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) suspected case: What you need to know](#)
- To respond to a confirmed case, school boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must follow current advice from DHHS: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) confirmed case: What you need to know](#).
- School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs should refer to the [Workplace Directions](#) for more about 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.

Arrangements for identifying and managing suspected and confirmed cases should include:

- Seeking advice from the student's family doctor or the medical practice providing GP services to the facility on symptomatic students
- Ensuring symptomatic staff do not attend work and seek advice on testing
- Isolating a suspected case until the test result is known
- 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, refer to [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.
- The use of PPE should in line with guidance for schools, with staff trained to understand when and how to use PPE appropriately
- The use of appropriate cleaning following a confirmed case at a school boarding premises or MTRP. School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must follow current advice from DHHS: [How to clean and disinfect after a COVID-19 case in non-healthcare settings](#).

## G. Identification and management of close contacts

There are challenges in identifying specific close contacts within a school boarding premises and MTRP 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 or MTRP, this could result in the facility needing to temporarily close.

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must also keep records of any staff member, student or visitor who attends the school premises for more than 15 minutes, to assist with contact tracing if required.

In the event of a confirmed case, school boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must follow all advice from DHHS. This includes working closely with DHHS to facilitate rapid contact tracing using the above records.

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must establish processes and procedures for quarantine of any identified close contacts, including the development of individual action plans. DHHS may also determine that secondary close contacts (close contacts of close contacts) need to quarantine.

Quarantine at school boarding premises and MTRPs must meet the expected criteria for any close contact in the community. School boarding premises must follow current advice from DHHS: [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) close contact: What you need to know](#).

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs 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.

## **H. The Victorian Chief Health Officer’s Workplace Directions and additional requirements for employees and employers regarding suspected or confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19)**

In line with the Victorian 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. Refer to [Section 4: COVIDSafe Plans](#).

## **6. DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING RISK MANAGEMENT PLANS**

Building on the risk assessment or review of arrangements for students, staff and residential facilities, school boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must develop and continue to review comprehensive risk management plans – in addition to their COVIDSafe Plan – to minimise the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19).

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs must also keep in mind their child safety obligations and any relevant regulatory requirements, including those for international students.

Risk management plans should include:

- scenario planning for single and multiple confirmed cases and/or close contacts, where the facility remains open
- scenario planning for single and multiple confirmed cases and/or close contacts, where the facility 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 in attendance at a school boarding premises or MTRP, determined in advance, outlining what will happen if they become a confirmed case, suspected case or close contact. Read [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 residential facility.

School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs should continue to refer to current Victorian Government [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) health advice](#) and adjust procedures and protocols as required. School boarding premises and schools operating MTRPs 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 and schools operating MTRPs are required to develop and update individual action plans for every staff and student attending the facility as appropriate.

## A. Individual action plans for students

Individual action plans for students are required to include:

- For students in attendance at school boarding premises and MTRPs, the process that will be implemented if:
  - they are a confirmed case of coronavirus (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 or MTRP, 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.
- For any future restrictions, whether students will return home or continue to reside at the facility.
  - If a student is to return home, details of any travel arrangements or interstate quarantine requirements.
- Any other obligations consistent with the school boarding premises' or MTRP's COVIDSafe Plan.

## B. Individual action plans for staff

Individual action plans for staff are required to include:

- For all staff members residing at or attending school boarding premises and MTRPs, the process that will be implemented if:
  - they are a confirmed case of coronavirus (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 or MTRP, if the isolation or quarantine period is not at the school boarding premises or MTRP, 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 residential facility is unable to accommodate safe isolation or quarantining.
- For any future restrictions, whether the staff member will continue to reside at or attend the facility, or return home.
  - If a staff member is to return home, details of any travel arrangements or interstate quarantine requirements.
- Any other obligations consistent with the school boarding premises' or MTRP's COVIDSafe Plan.

## 8. INVOLVING PARENTS IN DECISION MAKING

It is recommended that school boarding premises ensure that families and carers have a clear understanding, with documented acknowledgement, of the residential facility's proposed risk management plans, COVIDSafe plan and the advice included in this document.

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

## 9. RESOURCES

The following resources may assist school boarding premises to understand and meet the requirements detailed in this document:

- [COVIDSafe Summer](#)

### Department of Education and Training resources

- [Risk assessment and mitigation planning template for school boarding premises](#)
- [Health and safety advice for schools in the context of coronavirus](#)
- [Operating guidelines for schools](#)
- [PPE guidance for schools](#)
- [Face masks guidance for schools](#)
- [Advice for schools and families on medical vulnerability during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)

### Other key Victorian Government resources

- [Coronavirus advice](#)
- [Health and safety advice for all Victorian schools](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) confirmed case: What you need to know](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) suspected case: What you need to know](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) close contact: What you need to know](#)
- [How to clean and disinfect after a COVID-19 case in non-healthcare settings](#)
- [Face masks guidance](#)
- [Venue density guidance](#)
- [Stay Safe Directions, Workplace Directions and Restricted Activity Directions](#)
- [Translated resources](#)

### COVIDSafe Plan resources

- [DHHS advice on 'Business and Industry – restrictions by industry'](#)
- [COVIDSafe Plans](#)