

## COVID-19: Health Advice for Specialist Schools

What are our responsibilities in terms of informing parents that their child is in a class with a student/s that have difficulty managing nasal and/or oral hygiene?

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, schools should be providing information to parents about what measures can and are being implemented to minimise the risk of COVID-19 being transmitted within the school environment. Schools should also have procedures in place for identifying any students and staff who have chronic conditions or other risk factors that may make them particularly vulnerable to serious COVID-19 illness.

For students and staff who are identified as being more vulnerable to serious COVID-19 illness, a risk assessment regarding school attendance should be undertaken that takes into account the individual's risk factors, the school environment and the nature of the interactions the vulnerable person has with students and staff at the school.

At the present time, there is no evidence to suggest that community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in the ACT. The risk of a child contracting COVID-19 in a classroom setting in which one or more students are unable to manage nasal and/or oral hygiene is therefore considered very low at the present time in the ACT.

However, the situation with respect to community transmission of COVID-19 in the ACT may change in the future. In the event of COVID-19 community transmission in the ACT, parents should be provided with an appropriate level of information about the extent to which risk minimisation measures, such as physical distancing, hand hygiene and cough/sneezing etiquette could be implemented in their child's school environment.

Who is responsible for assessing risks to vulnerable students?

Parents of students with medical conditions that make them more vulnerable to severe illness from COVID-19 are responsible for seeking medical advice from their own GP on the suitability of onsite learning. Where reasonable adjustments can be made based on the GP's advice, schools should put those adjustments in place. Where reasonable adjustments can't be made, students should be supported to learn from home.

Are there any procedures that are considered too high a risk for staff to undertake? For example, suction? Suction usually takes place in the classroom with other staff and students in the same room as it is required regularly and without notice.

Procedures referred to as 'aerosol generating procedures' carry a higher risk of generating aerosols with particles potentially containing the virus that may transmit COVID-19. These

procedures would usually be conducted in a clinical environment and include procedures such as insertion or removal of an endotracheal tube, surgical procedures on the respiratory tract and procedures to induce a person to cough.

Shallow suctioning of oral secretions for the purposes of mouth care is not considered to be an aerosol generating procedure. However deeper suctioning that extends into the throat (pharynx) for the purposes of clearing the entry into the airways would be considered an aerosol generating procedure, as deep suctioning can cause a person to cough.

Given there is currently no evidence to suggest community transmission of COVID-19 in the ACT, shallow oral suctioning in the classroom would currently be considered a low-risk procedure.

What is recommended for cleaning chews? Students use these regularly and need to be able to put them back in their mouths after cleaning. How frequently should they be cleaned?

Chews should be cleaned every day. If available, a sterilising solution with both disinfection and food safety properties used for cleaning baby feeding bottles and accessories, can be used according to the manufacturer's instructions. If a suitable sterilising solution is not available, chews should be washed thoroughly with dishwashing detergent and hot water, and then should be rinsed and dried with paper towel. Chews should not be shared between children. Staff should perform hand hygiene after touching a chew.

If a parent has been called to pick up a child who is sick, are there requirements to isolate the child while waiting? Noting our students are unlikely to wait in our sick bay area. What supports are required for the staff member/s with the student, are the staff then required to isolate? Many of our students won't tolerate staff wearing masks and goggles.

A child who develops respiratory symptoms at school and is waiting to be picked up from school should wear a mask, if tolerated. If the child can't tolerate wearing a mask, then staff caring for a child who becomes sick whilst at school should wear a mask and carry out frequent hand hygiene. There is no need for the staff member to then isolate, unless they themselves become unwell or the child is confirmed to have COVID-19.

Some of our families don't have options to transport their child, can a school bus be used to transport a student home with staff members assisting? Do we have to notify the taxi in advance that the student is going home ill, if a taxi is required?

For advice in situations such as this, the ACT Health operations duty officer can be contacted on 5124 9225.

If a student has been collected by parents/carers due to illness can a medical certificate be requested before returning? Can we request one only after displaying only certain symptoms?

At the present time, when there are very few active cases of COVID-19 in the ACT, it would be reasonable to continue to follow the school's usual procedures with respect to students returning to school after a period of illness. Students should not return to school until their symptoms of respiratory illness have resolved.

If the ACT experiences an increase in COVID-19 cases, associated with community transmission, at that time it may be appropriate to request a medical certificate before students who have been unwell can return to school.

If a student was to be diagnosed with COVID-19, ACT Health would be actively following up the student and would not clear them for release from isolation until their illness had resolved and the criteria for release from isolation were met.

Can specialist schools utilise onsite hydrotherapy pools to support the health and behaviour management plans of students?

Yes. Schools have been identified as essential services. For those specialist schools who use hydrotherapy pools to support their usual operations, the restrictions on pools do not apply. There is no requirement to apply for an exemption for those schools. Physical distancing for adults and good hygiene should continue to be practiced in and around school pools.

Will therapists be allowed to visit students on site once we return to face-to-face learning? Are there any additional requirements they need to meet?

Whilst visitors such as therapists are permitted to attend on site at schools, they must ensure they adhere to the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) recommendations in relation to physical distancing and hygiene measures as outlined by the ACT Chief Health Officer advice to schools. They must ensure they maintain physical distancing of 1.5 meters between other adults, including staff and other visitors, at all times. They must report through the front office and wash their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitiser on arrival.

What if a student has symptoms not related to COVID-19?

At this point in time, any staff member or student who is unwell for any reason, must not attend an ACT public school. This is an important community responsibility that all parents, students and staff need to take seriously in order to prevent COVID-19. If your child's symptoms are not related to COVID-19 or another infectious illness, ask your doctor to provide a medical certificate confirming it is safe for them to attend, both for themselves and for others.

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SPREAD OF  
COVID-19

# FACT SHEET



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Should staff providing personal care for students be required to wear masks if this care must be provided within close contact to other adults?

This is not required. The risk of infection from short periods of contact between healthy adults is low given the current situation with COVID-19 in the ACT.

Should schools limit the movement of adults between spaces within the school?

This is not required given the current situation with COVID-19 in the ACT. Good hygiene practices are more important for preventing transmission.

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