

COVID-19: Information for Schools on Personal Protective Equipment

This section provides information to schools about when and what personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document should be referred to in addition to “Returning to Face to Face Learning and Work in ACT Public Schools – Guidelines”.

Introduction

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that can affect humans and animals. In humans, coronaviruses can cause mild illness, such as the common cold and gastrointestinal infections, as well as more severe illness, such as that caused by SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome).

COVID-19 is spread through droplets. Droplets can be formed from coughing sneezing, breathing, and talking. It is only possible to contract COVID-19 if infectious droplets come in contact with your eyes, nose or mouth. The ways that this could happen are:

- Through direct contact with droplets, for example if somebody sneezed close to you and the droplets came in contact with your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Indirect contact by touching objects or surfaces that have been contaminated with respiratory droplets from an infected person and then touching your face, especially your mouth, nose or eyes

Infection control steps to stop the spread of COVID-19

The most important ways to stop the spread of COVID-19 are to practice physical distancing (staying >1.5 m apart), good hand hygiene and cough etiquette (coughing or sneezing into your elbow or a tissue, disposing of the tissue immediately and then performing hand hygiene). Hand hygiene should always be performed in the following instances:

- Before and after providing care with a child (for example: nappy changing, assisting with toileting or feeding, providing first aid)
- After physical contact with the student or their surroundings (for example: after touching a student’s chair/desk or other personal items or aids)

Hand hygiene can be performed by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using a hand-sanitiser with at least 60% alcohol.

When is PPE required in schools?

In most cases, schools should follow their usual procedures when providing routine care that would normally require PPE (for example, wearing gloves and an apron if you might come in contact body fluids while providing care or assistance to a student).

PPE use if somebody develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19 whilst at school

If a staff member, child or young person at school develops symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath) they should be isolated in an appropriate space (e.g. a sick bay) with suitable supervision and be collected or return home as soon as possible.

- **Masks:** if a staff member or child has symptoms, they should wear a mask, if tolerated. If a child cannot tolerate a mask, the person looking after them should wear a mask, if possible.
- **Gloves and aprons:** these are only required to be worn by the staff member if they might come in contact with body fluids while providing care or assistance to another person with symptoms (e.g. vomiting).
- **Hand hygiene:** is the most important factor in minimising the risk of transmission of COVID-19 from a sick child or staff member.

The staff member should be instructed on the correct use of PPE. In particular, it is important to remove PPE correctly. Hand hygiene should always be carried out before and after each step of removing PPE.

PPE is not required when teaching or providing support to well children

Routine use of PPE, such as masks, is not required or recommended by ACT Health.

Information for schools that provide education to children with disabilities

Some schools provide education and assistance to children with complex needs and have specific infection control concerns. ACT Health has been liaising directly with the ACT Education Directorate to answer the specific questions raised about infection control. If you have questions or would like more information about this, please see the fact sheet Health Advice for Specialist Schools.

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