**ACT education and care services**

Initial Communications Package - Response to confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)

**Introduction**

This pack contains communications templates to support education and care providers, nominated supervisors and service leaders in the event of an education and care service (service) closure due to a confirmed case of COVID-19.

The decision to close a service will be made on the advice of ACT Health and the Chief Health Officer. ACT Health will advise a provider and service when it becomes aware of a child or staff member of a service who has tested positive to COVID-19 and may have attended the service while infectious.

Should the service become aware of a case directly from parents or staff, the service must contact ACT Health’s Communicable Disease Control Unit on [(02) 5124 9213](tel:0251249213) for direction.

The ACT Regulatory Authority Children’s Education and Care Assurance (CECA) should be advised by calling (02) 6247 1114or through the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS). CECA will seek advice from the ACT Health to verify the case.

Should the case be verified, the provider and service leaders will need to work in collaboration with ACT Health and CECA to commence processes outline in the [Notification decision action and recovery flowchart](https://www.education.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1647018/Notification-decision-action-and-recovery-flowchart-for-a-confirmed-case-of-COVID-19.pdf) this will include requirements for notifications, decisions, actions, stakeholder communication and the reopening of a service.

ACT Health will determine if the service needs to temporarily close while an investigation takes place to trace contacts and any further action required.

If required, CECA will liaise with the provider and service to support the closure.

If a staff, child or other person has tested positive to COVID-19 and was found to be infectious while at the service, the service may be closed, and the closure time frame will be determined on a case by case basis. This allows time for ACT Health to conduct contact tracing and take necessary steps to contain and slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

During the initial closure ACT Health will advise on the scope of cleaning before the service is able to reopen.

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

**Content**

This pack contains communications resources to support services in the event that the service is required to close due to COVID-19. Communications templates for anticipated milestones in the closure process are provided.

**Communications templates**

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| Initial closure communications | Purpose |
| Letter to parents, carers and staff (confirming case but no closure) | Inform families of confirmed case but no closure required |
| Letter to parents, carers and staff (confirming case and closure) | Inform families of confirmed case and closure required |
| Suggested media lines | To assist services in responding to any media enquires |
| Q&As on a service closure | To provide services with additional information, and to help respond to enquiries from families |

**Letter to parents, carers and staff**

**(CONFIRMING CASE BUT CLOSURE NOT REQUIRED)**

*This is a template suggested letter/email for services to send families. Use your service letterhead. Tailor for your specific circumstances and to meet the needs of families at your service as required.*

Dear parents, carers and staff,

ACT Health has confirmed that a **[CHILD/STAFF MEMBER]** at **[NAME OF SERVICE]** has tested positive for COVID-19.

I would like to reassure you that we took immediate action as soon as we became aware of the situation and sought advice from ACT Health and the Education Directorate’s Regulatory Authority Children’s Education and Care Assurance (CECA).

The **[CHILD/STAFF MEMBER]** did not attend the service while infectious and ACT Health’s investigation of the situation determined the service does not need to close.

ACT Health has also advised that staff, children and families do not need to take any further precautionary action beyond the measures such as practising physical distancing, implementing effective hand hygiene, getting tested for COVID-19 and staying home if unwell.

As **[CHILD/STAFF MEMBER]** did not attend while infectious, ACT Health also determined that additional cleaning of the service was not necessary.

I can reassure you that we are doing everything we can to ensure the health and safety of our community, and we have followed the advice from ACT Health and CECA.

I ask you to please respect the privacy of the **[CHILD/STAFF MEMBER]** and encourage the community to support each other during this time.

For more information about COVID-19, please visit the Education Directorate’ [website](https://www.education.act.gov.au/early-childhood/information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-for-early-childhood) and ACT Government’s dedicated [COVID-19 website](https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/).

Kind regards,

**[NAME]**

**Letter to parents, carers and staff**

**(CONFIRMING CASE AND CLOSURE REQUIRED)**

*This is template suggested letter/email for services to send families.*

*Use your service letterhead. Tailor for your specific circumstances and to meet the needs of families at your service as required*

Dear parents, carers and colleagues,

ACT Health has confirmed that a **[CHILD/STAFF MEMBER]** at **[****NAME OF SERVICE]** has tested positive for COVID-19.

Following advice from ACT Health **[NAME OF SERVICE]** will be closed to all children and staff from **[DATE]** for three days initially.

This closure will allow time for **[NAME OF PROVIDER/SERVICE]** and ACT Health to undertake a full risk assessment. The closure will also allow appropriate cleaning to occur on the recommendation of ACT Health.

ACT Health has advised that all children and staff are required to remain at home while contact tracing occurs.

If you are identified as being a potential close contact, ACT Health will be in contact to discuss the appropriate next steps, including testing.

I am very aware that this is a time of heightened anxiety for us all.

We wish the **[CHILD/YOU]** a quick recovery and look forward to welcoming **[THEM/YOU]** back to the service once well.

Thank you for your support, and I will provide any further information as soon as I receive any updates.

Yours sincerely,

**[NAME]**

***MEDIA SPEAKING POINTS***

*You may be asked questions by the media.*

*Below are some suggested lines to help your service communicate factual information.*

ACT Health has recommended closure of **[NAME OF SERVICE]** after a confirmed case of COVID-19 infection was identified in a **[CHILD/STAFF MEMBER]**.

**[NAME OF SERVICE]** will close for to all children and staff for at least [TIME FRAME], effective from **[DATE]**. This closure will allow time for **[NAME OF PROVIDER/SERVICE]** and ACT Health to undertake a full risk assessment and will allow for appropriate contract tracking and cleaning to occur.

We understand that this maybe a difficult time for **[STAFF/FAMILIES and CHILDREN]** and **[NAME OF PROVIDER]** wish them a quick recovery and look forward to welcoming them back to the service once they are well and ACT Health are satisfied that **[NAME OF SERVICE]** can reopen.

**Questions and Answers**

*These questions and answers may also provide support to providers and services when communicating with families, staff and the broader community.*

**Why has [SERVICE NAME] been closed?**

**[SERVICE NAME]** has been closed to protect the safety of everyone. This decision has been made in consultation with ACT Health.

If a member of the service community has tested positive to COVID-19 and was found to be infectious when at the service, closure of the service will allow time for staff from ACT Health to carry out contact tracing, initiate cleaning, and take any other steps necessary to contain and slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community.

**How long will [SERVICE NAME] be closed for?**

The length of time a service is be closed will be decided on a case-by-case basis on the expert advice of ACT Health. The decision to re-open a service will be made when ACT Health deem it safe to do so.

**What will happen if a close contact is identified in the service community?**

ACT Health will work with the service to identify and notify any children, families, visitors and staff identified as having been in close contact with a confirmed case, providing further advice and direction.

**The service has been closed. Can other activities, such as co-located outside school hours care (OSHC) or a school holiday program still operate?**

In the first instance, no other activities co-located with the service should continue until advised otherwise by ACT Health.

The scope of the service closure will be decided on a case-by-case basis on the expert advice of ACT Health through the initial assessment and contact tracing process.

**Where can I find more information about COVID-19 in the ACT?**

**I**information about COVID-19 can be accessed from the Coronavirus Health Information Line on [1800 020 080](tel:1800020080) (operates 24 hours a day) and the [ACT Government’s COVID-19](https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/) website.