

Introduction

The ACT Government is taking every precaution during this time to limit the spread of COVID-19 and keep the ACT community safe. The ACT Government has approached the pathway out of lockdown for ACT schools with careful planning, drawing on national and local health advice, in response to the current and emerging needs of staff, students and families. These guidelines seek to balance the health and safety of staff and young people, with the benefits of face-to-face learning, particularly during a critical time in the year for year 11 and 12 students.

The [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee \(AHPPC\)](#) has advised that physical distancing, hand and respiratory hygiene, regular cleaning and disinfection of the environment, and staying home if unwell, continue to be effective measures for responding to new variants of COVID-19. Systems to rapidly respond to cases (which may include temporary school closure), along with the agility to adjust measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are important. Schools should be ready to return to a snap lockdown or temporarily close (in response to an exposure) if directed by the ACT Chief Health Officer.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

How should the safety of staff and young people be managed in ACT schools with senior secondary students?

Schools with senior secondary students (years 11-12) will be required to adhere to AHPPC's updated advice on minimising the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools¹. In the ACT context this includes:

- **Hygiene** - Good hygiene practices are important to preventing the spread of COVID-19. All staff, visitors, and young people must wash their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand-sanitiser on arrival and regularly throughout the day, cough into their elbows or a tissue, place used tissues straight into the bin, avoid touching eyes, noses or mouths, not share food or drink, and ensure strict hygiene in the preparation of food. Schools will need to display signage and proactively implement routines and practices to ensure good hygiene practices are in place.
- **Physical distancing**– It is understood that it is difficult to require physical distancing measures to be put in place for students on school sites, particularly younger students. However, schools are encouraged to put in place measures which support physical distancing wherever possible. This could include minimising the mixing and mingling of students who don't usually learn together through staggering of breaks for larger schools, management of entry and exit points, and restricting extracurricular activities that would bring together young people from multiple year groups or classes. Physical distancing can also be supported by encouraging students to remain seated during classes and limiting gathering in social spaces and indoor communal areas. Schools could also, for example, dedicate social spaces and shared facilities (e.g. bathrooms) to particular year cohorts. Use of outdoor spaces should be maximised where possible.

All adults on school sites must maintain physical distancing between themselves and other adults. Signage must be displayed to ensure physical distancing requirements are clear. Schools must limit on site visitors to essential visitors only. Parents and carers must not attend school sites unless in the case of an emergency or to provide additional support needs based on the needs of their young person, as

¹ [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee \(AHPPC\) updated statement on minimising the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools](#) | Australian Government Department of Health



negotiated with the principal. Density requirements do not apply to young people onsite in schools; however schools should consider physical distancing measures (as outlined above) wherever possible.

- **Environmental cleaning** – Site specific cleaning plans must be in place to ensure regular cleaning of high touch surfaces (such as handrails and desks), frequently used objects (such as staff desk top computers), and bathrooms.
- **Ventilation**- Ventilation systems must be adjusted where needed to increase the fresh (external) air being supplied to classrooms. Where available, this should include adjusting settings connected to HVAC systems to avoid the recirculation of air throughout the school environment. Classrooms that are not connected to large HVAC systems typically have external ventilation and split system AC units so the fresh air source can be readily controlled. Mechanical controls are also effective, such as opening windows and doors. Outdoor learning is also encouraged where possible.
- **Prevention of COVID-19 transmission in schools**- If a staff member or young person is unwell for any reason², they must not attend an ACT school. If they attend while unwell, they must be sent home. Standard precautions need to be taken, as per normal procedures, for staff or volunteers who are providing routine care or first-aid assistance.
 - **Suspected cases** – Staff or young people at a school experiencing symptoms compatible with COVID-19 (e.g. fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath) must be isolated in an appropriate space with suitable supervision and collected by a parent/carer as soon as possible.
 - **Confirmed cases**- If a staff member, young person or family member is diagnosed with COVID-19, ACT Health will provide direction on further management, which may result in full or partial school closure while site cleaning and contact tracing is undertaken. A procedure has been developed and implemented to manage this situation. This includes the initial health response as well as supporting schools to deliver modified remote learning for students in quarantine.

Schools must be ready to respond to a community wide lockdown if restrictions are reinstated in response to a COVID-19 outbreak in the ACT. The ACT Government has procedures in place to respond to a confirmed or suspected case in an ACT school. This includes working with the ACT Chief Health Officer to determine risks and may include full or partial closure of an individual school. Quarantine and testing requirements will be communicated directly to school communities. Schools will be responsible for supporting continuity of learning for young people during a period of quarantine.

- **Balancing measures against local risks**- Offsite activities that are essential for assessment purposes must be managed in line with Public Health Directions. Other offsite activities are not allowed. All staff, visitors, and senior secondary students must wear a face mask on site, unless exempt, when eating or drinking, when communicating with a person who is hard of hearing, when exercising vigorously, when outside alone, or in an emergency. Schools must implement procedures to induct and actively monitor adherence to the Public Health Directions for all members of the school community when onsite.
- **Wellbeing supports**- young people, families and staff will all experience the impacts of COVID-19 in their own way. For some, this may include feelings of distress, anxiety, or confusion. A range of wellbeing supports and resources specifically for young people and families are available on the [ACT Health website](#). Schools should identify specific wellbeing supports for students and staff.

² Non-transmissible chronic medical conditions supported by a medical certificate are not included (e.g. allergies)

