

Thursday 19 March 2020

## COVID-19: update from the Minister for Education and Secretary of the Department of Education and Training

Dear School Leaders, Teachers and School Support Staff,

On behalf of our students, parents and the whole Victorian community, we write to thank you for the outstanding work you continue to do in these very challenging times.

Across Victoria, we are seeing countless examples of schools supporting, reassuring and informing their local communities, and ensuring our young people continue to receive the quality of education we pride ourselves on in the Education State.

Today Victoria's Chief Health Officer released a further statement explaining why it continues to be safe for our students, teachers and support staff to be at school. The full statement is available here:



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One of the reasons why schools have been kept open by governments across Australia, on the basis of the advice from the health and medical experts, is that people remaining in their routine daily activities, whilst decreasing non-essential social and mass gathering activities, will decrease the opportunities for spread in our community, including those to teachers.

There is evidence that children in households may be infected by adults within the households, which is why all household contacts of confirmed cases are placed into home isolation when a case is confirmed. This will continue throughout the COVID-19 response.

Thus far, approximately 2% of total cases in China have been in children, and there have been no deaths in children under 10 years with very few hospitalisations. There is emerging evidence indicates that the people who are most unwell, and most symptomatic are more infectious than those with very mild or minimal symptoms.

There is not widespread community transmission at this point, and levels of COVID-19 illness are likely to be very low. Children who are at all unwell are advised to be at home, and schools and teachers should exclude any unwell children who present to school. Any children with undetected symptoms are likely to be minimally infectious.

At this point there is no evidence of any school clusters where infections were driven by the student population or student introductions. The evidence is reviewed daily and advice will continue to be tailored to the evidence. Any change in policy advice will consider the risk to teachers as well as the broader community.

**Adj Clin Prof Brett Sutton**

Victorian Chief Health Officer  
Health Protection Branch

19/03/2020

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We have been listening carefully and responding to the feedback and questions coming in from schools. In addition to our existing contact options, we have now established a dedicated DET Coronavirus Advice line for government school staff which you can call on 03 8563 8621.

We know that our school teachers and staff have been raising a range of important issues, including the need for increased support regarding cleaning and hygiene supplies, and we have received strong and clear representations from the Australian Education Union on behalf of the workforce.

We are taking immediate action because there is nothing more important than keeping our students and teachers safe and well. The Department has today ordered extended and additional cleaning to commence in all schools through to the end of term.

This extended and additional cleaning will focus on the cleaning of high touch points throughout the school. Cleaning will happen progressively throughout the day to ensure that the risks of transmission are reduced.

This will involve increased disinfectant and detailed cleaning of the common touch points, including washbasins, all entry and exit points and shared surfaces including chairs and desks.

A combination of additional hours and/or additional cleaning staff will be brought on to do this across Victoria.

The Department is actively working with product suppliers and cleaning providers to ensure there is an adequate supply of cleaning products. In addition, the Department is delivering additional hand sanitiser to schools today, with further deliveries to follow.

We also know how important it is that we plan for transition to learning at home arrangements for our students, a transition our school system needs to be ready for, in line with any changes to the Chief Health Officer advice.

Thank you for work you have done to prepare. The Department is well prepared to support you in the event that you are required to make this transition and to ensure resources, advice, guidance and supports are available to each and every school.

Thank you again for your outstanding work. Later today, the daily update from Deputy Secretary David Howes will provide further responses to issues and questions that have come through from schools.

Yours sincerely,

**Hon. James Merlino MP**  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education

**Jenny Atta**  
Secretary  
Department of Education and Training