

Operating guidelines and Q&As for schools

Very high caseload settings

Level 1 public health and social measures

Effective 26 April 2022

Schools are safe and open for learning

In line with the latest advice from the Chief Health Officer, WA remains in very high COVID-19 caseload settings. Eased public health and social measures come into effect for schools from 26 April 2022.

Keeping our schools open and providing face-to-face learning to students is important to their learning, social and emotional development, and physical and mental wellbeing. The purpose of these revised measures is to keep schools open and functioning in a very high COVID-19 caseload environment in the Western Australian community.

These guidelines have been developed for schools to plan for Term 2. If conditions change the Chief Health Officer will advise the department to adjust settings.

Very high COVID-19 caseload testing and isolation requirements will be in place for school settings and will reduce the need for students or staff to isolate and quarantine for long periods.

Q. Who do the very high caseload settings apply to?

These revised settings apply to all who attend Western Australian schools and boarding/residential facilities, and early childhood education centres throughout the State. All staff and students in these settings are required to follow the defined testing and isolation protocols in a very high COVID-19 caseload environment.

Q. Why have the public health and social measures been eased while WA is still in a very high caseload setting?

The Level 2 public health and social measures were intended as a short-term setting to minimise the surge in cases and hospitalisations. Level 1 measures will continue to apply across the state as a transitional measure to minimise transmission.

Definitions

For the purposes of implementing these guidelines, the following definitions apply:

- **Vaccination requirement** means staff to be double dose vaccinated against COVID-19, effective from 12.01 am on 31 January 2022 and have a third dose (booster) of vaccine within one calendar month of becoming eligible, unless the staff member has an approved exemption.
 - [Education Worker \(Restrictions on Access\) Directions \(No. 5\)](#)
 - [Booster Vaccination \(Restrictions on Access\) Directions \(No. 2\)](#)

- [Proof of Vaccination Directions \(No. 5\)](#).
- **Ad hoc basis** means attendance at any education facility or facilities no more than once a week.
 - *Note: A person who attends multiple education facilities in a week, but does not visit the same education facility twice, does not attend on an ad hoc basis. For example, a tradesperson who works at school A on Monday and then works at school B on Wednesday of the same week must comply with the vaccination requirements in these directions.*
- Therefore, regular basis means more than once per week (either within one site or across multiple school sites).
- **School sites (education facility)** include:
 - a school, including Statewide Services (33 Giles Avenue, Padbury)
 - a community kindergarten
 - a boarding premises (boarding/residential facilities).

Critical worker

Any person who is employed or contracted to work in a school (K-12), including teachers and educational support staff, may be identified as a critical worker. This also includes residential facilities for boarding students. Refer to [Critical worker operating guidelines](#).

Close contact

In a very high caseload environment, a **close contact** includes:

- **A household close contact:** a household member or intimate partner of a person with COVID-19 who has had contact with them during their infectious period.
- **Non-household close contact:** someone who has had close contact with a person in their infectious period, including:
 - At least 15 minutes face-to-face contact where *a mask was not worn by both the person with COVID-19 and the exposed person.*
 - Greater than two hours within a small room or classroom environment, *where masks have been removed* for this period by both the person with COVID-19 and the exposed person (note: others wearing masks in this scenario would not be a contact).
- Someone who is directed by WA Health that they are a close contact.

Testing and isolation protocols

Refer to the [Close contact definitions and testing and isolation protocols for public schools](#).

Q. What leave is available for staff who need to isolate and/or are confirmed as COVID-19 positive?

Refer to [Manage staff leave and absence due to COVID-19](#) on Ikon for the latest information.

Q. How will a school know if a student who continues to attend school as a non-household asymptomatic close contact has tested negative to COVID-19?

There is no requirement for parents to report to a school that their child has tested negative to COVID-19. Parents/carers are instructed to inform the school if their child tests positive and must keep them home until well and free of symptoms.

Vaccination requirement

All staff working at a school site and visitors on a regular basis are required to meet the vaccination requirement.

Public school attendance

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) encourages all students who are well to attend school, including those with health conditions. Student and staff attendance at school should be informed by the [Close contact definitions and testing and isolation protocols for public schools](#).

Where students are unable to attend onsite learning, schools should record attendance based on the following codes:

- Any symptoms – N code (Notified sick).
- Asymptomatic close contact and parent chooses for child to isolate - R code (authorised absence with an acceptable reason).
- When remote learning is offered:
 - E code (approved education activity) with record of participation.
 - U code (unexplained absence) with no record of participation.

You will be advised to use the:

- Y code when a student is isolating, and it is not practicable to provide remote learning, or when there is an enforced school closure.

Continuity of teaching and learning

- Ensuring teaching and learning continuity is a priority and schools have plans for students to learn remotely in the event of COVID-19 related absence.
- Although remote learning is to be offered, principals may consider a student's capacity to engage, considering whether the:
 - student is in isolation as a COVID-19 positive case
 - student is in quarantine as a close contact.
- Support for school leaders and teachers may be accessed through Ikon:
 - **Prepare:** [Prepare for remote learning](#) as a whole school so that each class has a clear set of expectations and understandings to deliver remote learning.
 - **Respond:** Advice, support and learning continuity resources on [Connect Discover](#) and through the [Connected Learning Hub](#).
 - **Recover:** Teachers support the student to return to school.
- Additional learning and student wellbeing online resources are available to all families at [Learning at Home](#). These online resources will include advice and support for parents/carers and students.
- Schools should refer to the [guiding principles of remote teaching and learning](#) when making a decision about delivery of educational programs to these students.

Q. When do I need to provide work for students who are not at school?

Schools need to provide work for students who need to stay at home due to isolation or quarantine requirements (E or Y attendance code) or are close contacts who choose to stay home (R attendance code). Schools are not required to provide work to students who are being kept at home by a parent when there is no COVID-19 positive case, or the student is not a close contact (U attendance code).

School activities during school hours – offsite and onsite

- School activities must promote and practise good hygiene principles.
- In-school indoor events with more than a class size can be held with masks and physical distancing.
 - Particular consideration should be taken for Kindergarten to Year 2 as there is no mask mandate for these students.
 - For choir and orchestra refer to [Guidelines for music in schools](#).
- Assemblies are allowed under the following conditions:
 - Limit to a single year group only.

- Close contacts cannot attend assemblies. Provision should be made for close contacts to access assemblies in an alternative way e.g. online, where practicable.
- Consider seating arrangements for mask-exempt students e.g. seated apart from each other.
- Assemblies should be held outdoors or in well ventilated spaces.
- Parents/carers may attend year group assemblies provided they comply with mask wearing and physical distancing requirements.
- Staff meetings, including collaborative planning meetings, can occur with mask wearing and physical distancing in place.
- Professional development activities involving staff from multiple schools should be conducted online or postponed.
- Staff should avoid situations where they have masks off for longer than 15 minutes when in close proximity.
- Swimming programs can continue onsite and offsite.
- Compliance with mandatory vaccination requirements is to be adhered to according to the off-site venue and exceptions that may apply (e.g. age of the students).

Playgrounds

- Playgrounds and play equipment should be cleaned once a week.
 - Students should be encouraged to wash hands after use of playground/play equipment.

Excursions

- Excursions can continue in compliance with venue-based requirements.
 - Prior to approval for off-site activities, as part of the excursion risk assessment documents, ensure the business or venue has an up-to-date COVID-19 Safety Plan that it continues to implement.

Q. Can libraries stay open?

Yes, library access should be managed. See further [Ideas on cohorting and contact minimisation in schools](#).

Q. Can university practicums continue on school sites?

Yes. Pre-service teachers are required to meet vaccination and sign-in requirements.

Q. Are therapy pools able to be used?

Yes.

Q. Can we have face to face meetings including P&C and school board/council?

Yes, however continue mask wearing, physical distancing where possible and maintain good hygiene.

Q. Can incursions go ahead?

Yes, however planning considerations for incursions should include vaccination, mask wearing and physical distancing requirements for visitors.

Infrequent special events

Large one off events may continue provided adherence to mask wearing, physical distancing, venue capacity and density limits, and vaccination requirements, as required. Consideration should be given to student age, cohorting, and length of activity. **Outside of school hours, community venue capacity and density requirements apply to schools.**

Before approval for offsite activities is made, as part of the excursion risk assessment documents, ensure the business or venue has an up to date COVID-19 Safety Plan that it continues to implement.

- **Performing arts/musical/band performances** with forward-facing seating must comply with 75 per cent capacity limit.
- **School balls** can be held offsite.
 - Where school balls are held at a venue which requires persons 16 years or older to be vaccinated, school students are required to comply.
 - Follow and comply with any venue requirements.
 - If schools wish to hold their school balls onsite, an exemption will be considered provided the school ensures that all attendees over 16 are fully vaccinated and compliant with any other public health and social measures in place at the time (including mask mandates).
- **Indoor sporting events** are permitted, and spectators are allowed but must comply with venue requirements.
- **Outdoor sporting events** are permitted, and spectators are allowed but must comply with venue requirements.
- **Other interschool events** are permitted, and spectators are allowed but must comply with venue requirements.
- **Camps** are to be postponed. The Chief Health Officer has advised that camps present an increased risk of spread to students particularly due to shared sleeping arrangements. It is not reasonable to expect students to wear masks while they are sleeping and sharing facilities including bedrooms and bathrooms while on school camps. The Chief Health Officer will consider this measure again at the start of Term 2.
- **Interstate or international travel** is not to be planned or undertaken, unless for essential business purposes and has been approved.

Q. Can parent information evenings resume?

Yes, with consideration given to the WA Government mask wearing mandates and physical distancing.

Q. Can school balls occur onsite and offsite?

Yes, ensuring students and staff adhere to mask wearing mandates, venue capacity and density limits, and vaccination mandates. Schools can hold their school balls onsite provided the school ensures that all attendees over 16 are fully vaccinated and compliant with any other public health and social measures in place at the time.

Q. Under what conditions can staff travel interstate to attend conferences?

Staff may be able to attend a conference if it is considered essential for the operation of the school, has been approved by the department, and cannot be undertaken online.

Q. Under what conditions can overnight intrastate travel be approved?

Overnight intrastate travel may be approved to:

- relieve critical teaching positions
- provide support to schools impacted by COVID-19

- support student/staff health and wellbeing in instances where alternatives to face-to-face support are not appropriate
- ensure teaching and learning continuity
- complete a qualification or learning area assessment if it cannot be undertaken online. This does not include professional learning events that can be delivered online.

Work placement

- Schools should conduct work placement risk assessments to ensure employers comply with WA COVID-19 Health guidelines.
- Continue to confirm that work environments have COVID-19 Safety Plans in place.
- Students aged 16 and above on work placement or experience are required to show proof of vaccination, at a rural or remote resources industry site or a remote operating centre, or as required by relevant Direction.
- Student work placements, simulated work placements and work experience will be required to follow any public health restrictions applicable to their work placement site.

Note: Students who are non-household close contacts are not permitted to leave school grounds to undertake work placement.

School canteens

School canteens can open, and parents/carers and community volunteers can continue to assist in school canteens.

- Regular cleaning is to be undertaken.
- Schools should review and update as needed their school risk assessment procedures to include COVID-safe principles.
- School canteens may continue to be an exception from the requirement for a COVID-19 Safety Plan.
- Mandatory requirement that all public education facilities confirm and record regular ancillary worker (such as contractor) compliance of COVID-19 vaccination status.

Health and hygiene

Arrangements to continue to reduce direct contact, enhance personal hygiene practices, and strengthen cleaning regimes in schools are to be encouraged.

Each person has a responsibility to protect themselves and others. This is achieved through the ongoing promotion of the following good hygiene principles and practices:

- staff, students, and parents must stay home when sick
- adults maintain physical distancing from other adults, where practicable
- avoiding unnecessary physical contact and physical greetings (e.g. handshakes, hugs)
- covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, using a flexed elbow or tissue and disposing of tissues appropriately
- washing hands regularly for 20 seconds with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub, including prior to meal breaks
- supplies of soap and other cleaning agents are available for all schools. The department will continue to support any school that experiences supply issues
- [posters](#) and visible messaging regarding hand washing and cough-sneeze hygiene should be displayed in schools.

Q. Where do I access additional alcohol-based hand-rub and cleaning agents?

Schools should continue to use their current ordering and procurement processes. The department will continue to support any school experiencing supply issues. Call the COVID-19 Support Team on 1800 882 345.

Masks

- Staff and students from Year 3 and above must wear a mask at all times indoors unless:
 - the person has a physical, developmental or mental illness, condition or disability which makes wearing a face covering inappropriate
 - communicating with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing and visibility of the mouth is essential for communication
 - the person is engaged in physical activity, including physical education classes and organised sport
 - the person is consuming food, drink or medicine
 - staff are providing teaching or instructions to students; however, staff are encouraged to wear masks even when teaching, where practicable.
- Students in Years 3 and above who are non-household close contacts who remain asymptomatic and are attending school, are required to wear a mask at all times during their modified quarantine arrangements, unless one of the above exceptions applies.
- Masks are encouraged but not required for Kindergarten to Year 2 based on advice from the Chief Health Officer.
- Adults, including parents and carers, must wear a mask on school sites, even when outdoors unless physical distancing can be maintained. Exemptions and exceptions continue to apply.
- Refer to [COVID Transition Face Covering Directions No. 5](#).

Q. What do I do if a person refuses to wear a mask?

The WA Government mask mandate outlines the requirements around wearing masks. Refer to [Manage face masks at school](#) on Ikon for guidance.

Q. What kind of masks should staff wear?

The Chief Health Officer advises the use of surgical masks. Refer to [How to put on and take off your face mask \(healthywa.wa.gov.au\)](#).

Q. What evidence does a parent need to provide for a student mask exemption?

An approved medical certificate issued by a medical practitioner registered in Australia that certifies illness, injury, condition or disability.

Q. Is a student with a mask exemption precluded from participating in any school activities or excursions?

No, they can participate in any activity as they have an exemption.

Ventilation

Schools are to adhere to the department's ventilation operating guidelines as approved by the Chief Health Officer.

- Use fresh air and well-ventilated spaces where possible.

Cleaning for all schools

Cleaning guidelines are based on, and continuously reviewed in line with, advice from WA Health.

- Cleaning of high-touch surfaces, including classrooms, meeting rooms and washroom/toilets should be completed at a minimum on a daily basis.
- Playgrounds and play equipment should be cleaned once a week.
 - Hand hygiene before and after use of equipment should be encouraged.
- Schools are to ensure water bubblers have good water pressure, handles are cleaned daily and when used to fill water bottles, students do not make contact with their mouths.
- Bin waste removal after school daily.

- Computer keyboards and mice, printers, photocopiers and telephones cleaned once a day.

Q. Are school cleaners required to clean throughout the school day?

Cleaning guidelines are based on, and continuously reviewed in line with, advice from the WA Health and address cleaning of high-touch surfaces at a minimum of once a day but are not required during the school day. A school may choose to employ a day cleaner. Refer to [Infection prevention and control advice on cleaning and disinfection in the workplace](#).

Visitors on school sites

Parents/carers on school sites

Must comply with the health and hygiene conditions previously outlined and follow mask wearing requirements, outlined above.

Parents/carers are only allowed on school sites for the following purposes:

- outdoor drop-off/pick up of their child
- assemblies (limited to year group)
- parent/teacher meetings
- to volunteer in roles outside of the classroom that are essential for the operations of the school, including the canteen and uniform shop
- Infrequent special events in line with community venue capacity and density limits, and mask wearing requirements.

Parents/carers attending school sites must adhere to physical distancing requirements where possible.

Ancillary Workers (regular contractors, volunteers and third-party providers including medical or allied services practitioners/therapists) on school sites

- Ancillary workers are allowed on school sites and to access school facilities.
- In accordance with the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, schools are required to take reasonable steps to facilitate the provision of support services, such as therapy.
- Schools can continue to make local decisions regarding the provision of services, on their site/s.
- When considering use of school facilities and resources, principals consider their duty of care of students and staff. These considerations continue alongside COVID-19 practices such as:
 - suitability of, and access to, the facilities to be used
 - alternatives to face-to-face meetings, such as the use of technology, where practicable and appropriate
 - cleaning of all facilities used for meetings
 - cleaning of equipment used for the purposes of therapy
 - physical distancing, use of PPE and good hygiene practices.
- Where modifications are required to the existing provision of services, schools must consult with parents about these modifications and limit the disruption caused by the modification.
- Principals should continue to liaise with providers to ensure understanding of, and compliance with, school and department policies and processes.
- Guidelines and resources about parent initiated service providers accessing students on school sites during school hours are available on [Ikon](#).
- Information for parents and providers is published on the department's [website](#).
- Families may be referred to the NDIS COVID support line on 1800 800 110.

Entry requirements:

- Mandatory requirement that all public education facilities confirm and record non-employee compliance of COVID-19 vaccination status.
- All visitors to school sites must sign-in as per the [Visitors and Intruders on Public School Premises Policy](#).
- Comply with mask requirements at all times.

Non ancillary workers attending on an ad hoc basis

- Are allowed on school sites if they:
 - sign in, as per the [Visitors and Intruders on Public School Premises Policy](#)
 - show compliance of COVID-19 vaccination, if required. Public education facilities are required to confirm and record non-employees (such as contractors) compliance of COVID-19 vaccination.
- Follow mask wearing requirements, outlined above.
- Display appropriate signage regarding expectations and restrictions for all visitors at school sites.

Third Party user - facility access

- Groups using the facility under third party agreements including community and non-community use, outside of school hours care (OSH), school uniform shop and canteen (not P&C) and playgroups are included in this category and can continue to operate on school sites.
- Third party users can use school premises in accordance with public and social health measures relating to capacity and density limits.

Q. Can third party users access the school premises at weekends?

Yes, in line with the above requirements.

Co-located/shared sites

- Co-located school sites include those that share grounds with other educational facilities such as universities and education support schools, centres or programs.
- Principals should communicate relevant information for continued operation as safe learning environments.

Shared or joint-use facilities – under agreements between the department and other party

Shared or joint use facilities must follow requirements related to:

- COVID-19 vaccination for non-employees, such as contractors
- WA Government mask wearing requirements
- testing and isolation protocols.

Principals with shared facilities should contact the department for specific advice where needed.

Immunocompromised students

- As per AHPPC guidelines, with COVID-19 safety planning and procedures in place and health systems ready to quickly identify and respond to cases, schools remain safe.
- Ensure documented plans for immunocompromised students are managed in accordance with their needs and are supported either through the school in which they are enrolled or the Schools of Special Educational Needs.
- School staff can access support from the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health (SSEN: MMH) for students who cannot attend school due to them, or a family member, having an immune compromised medical condition during COVID-19.

- Immunocompromised students will be supported through remote learning plans to ensure continuity of learning if the school is deemed high risk.

Medically vulnerable and immunocompromised staff

- All employees, even those at high risk, can attend work with appropriate controls in place such as a COVID-19 action plan developed in consultation with the employee's medical practitioner.
- The department may decide on alternative work options for medically vulnerable staff. Medically vulnerable staff may be supported to work remotely using remote working from home plans to ensure continuity of learning if the school is deemed to be high risk.

School bus services

Maintaining clear communication with bus operators will help maintain safety and continuity in their service.

Schools should be aware that school buses are unable to transport students in the following circumstances:

- any student who is notified as a household close contact (these students need to complete 7 days isolation)
- any student who develops symptoms during the school day
- any student who is supposed to be isolating.

Schools need to plan for alternative arrangements in the instance that the student needs alternate transport from school to home. Planning may include:

- updating existing parent/carer contact details with an indication of their ability to provide transport for the student
- collecting emergency contact details of significant others who could assist in providing transport if needed
- ensuring plans are in place if a parent or emergency contact is unavailable.

Travel to remote Aboriginal communities

Under the WA Government's [Remote Aboriginal Communities Directions](#), the only people who can enter a remote Aboriginal community are residents of those communities and those who are:

- providing essential services and supplies
- going to work or school there
- entering for family or cultural reasons
- delivering a community program or activity
- entering in an emergency.

These people cannot enter a community if they have COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19, or if they are waiting for a test result or have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19.

Close contacts who are asymptomatic are unable to enter remote Aboriginal communities. For more information visit the WA Government [website](#).

Data

To assist in the review of these guidelines, particular workforce and student data will be required. Wherever possible these data will be sourced centrally, however there may be information required from schools. Schools will be informed on how data will be collated, and the frequency of data required.

COVID-19 support contacts

For further information relating to these guidelines please see below.

COVID-19 Support Team	coronavirussupport@education.wa.edu.au
Phone support (8:00 am – 4:00 pm weekdays)	1800 882 345
Curriculum / Connected Learning	connectedlearning@education.wa.edu.au
Phone support (8:00 am – 4:00 pm weekdays)	9413 3394
Student Wellbeing	COVID19.studentwellbeing@education.wa.edu.au
Phone support	9402 6428