

COVID-19 frequently asked questions for parents and carers

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Return to school

Will schools return at the start of Term 1, 2022?

Yes, the school year will start on time on 9 February 2022 for Tasmanian Government students.

How has the Department of Education prepared for return to school?

We have a clear plan in place to return to school safely on 9 February 2022, and make every day of learning count. The Department's [Return to school plan](#) sets out how we will manage COVID-19 in schools and early childhood education and care. It aligns with the [national approach](#) for return to school. Please refer to this plan for detailed information.

What will Term 1, 2022 look like in Tasmanian schools?

Face-to-face learning will continue in schools and early childhood education and care, with COVID-safe measures in place. There is a clear process in place to manage COVID-19 cases in schools. Regular school activities – like school photos, music and swimming lessons and excursions – will continue in a COVID-safe manner. However, if the situation changes, this will be re-visited on a school-by-school basis. For details, please refer to the [Return to school plan](#).

Do I need to send my child to school?

Yes. If your child is well and not a [close contact](#), they should be attending school. School attendance is important for improved learning and health and wellbeing outcomes. Your child does not need to be vaccinated to attend school – although it is [recommended for children 5 years and older](#). The Department of Education has a clear plan in place and maintaining a safe learning environment is our top priority. For details, please refer to the [Return to school plan](#).

COVID-safe measures in schools

What measures are you taking to keep kids safe at school?

Proactive measures are in place to limit the impact of COVID-19 in our schools. These include:

- **Vaccination:** Children aged 5 years and older are encouraged to be vaccinated. Vaccination is not mandatory for a child to attend school. All Department of Education staff, including volunteers and contractors, are vaccinated.
- **Face masks:** All adults will wear face masks, however teachers may remove their masks if required to assist clear communication when teaching (for example, to meet the needs of students with disability). Face masks do not need to be worn in primary schools, however students can wear them if they would like to. Secondary school students must wear face masks indoors. Medical exceptions apply. All schools are well stocked with face masks.
- **Ventilation:** Open windows and air purifiers will be used in classrooms.
- **Outdoor learning:** Schools will take advantage of outdoor learning opportunities.

- **Physical distancing:** All adults will keep a physical distance of 1.5 metres from each other.
- **Hygiene practices:** Regular handwashing and sanitising will continue.
- **Cleaning:** Frequent cleaning will continue, particularly on high-touch surfaces.
- **Safe site management:** Non-essential visitors will be limited, and must follow COVID-19 safety measures. COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended. Schools will regularly review their COVID-19 safety plans.

Each student will be provided with an initial supply of two rapid antigen tests (RATs) before school starts, then with two RATs per week for each student to use if they have symptoms. All school staff will be provided with two RATs to use if they have symptoms. These will be distributed through the school.

What cleaning processes are in place in schools?

Frequent cleaning of schools will continue in 2022, particularly on high-touch surfaces.

Do schools have enough handwash?

Yes. Schools have a sufficient supply of handwash.

Do schools have enough rapid antigen tests (RATs)?

Yes. Schools have sufficient supply of rapid antigen tests (RATs), with supply to be replaced as required. Each student will be provided with an initial supply of two RATs before school starts, then with two RATs per week for each student to use if they have symptoms. All school staff will be provided with two RATs to use if they have symptoms.

Do schools have enough face masks?

Yes. Schools have a sufficient supply of face masks with supplies to be replaced as required.

Do schools have a COVID-19 safety plan?

Yes. Schools have a COVID-19 safety plan in place. Schools regularly review their COVID safety plans, and have clear procedures in place to manage any confirmed COVID-19 cases. You will receive information directly from your school should there be a closure. School closures will also be listed on the [Alerts webpage](#).

Should students be sharing food and drinks?

No. It's important students are not sharing food and drinks. Good hygiene practices help slow the spread of COVID-19.

Can the school water fountain be used?

Yes. School water fountains can still be used. Frequent cleaning of schools will continue in 2022, particularly on high-touch surfaces.

How will materials that have been off-site be handled at school?

Any materials that have been off-site (for example toys, books, learning materials, overnight bags, or personal items) will be allowed at school, but hands must be washed before and after touching or handling them. The number of people handling these items should be limited as well.

Face masks

Will students need to wear face masks at school?

Face masks do not need to be worn in primary schools, however students can wear them if they would like to. If you have a 12 year old who is still in primary school, they do not need to wear a mask at school – but they would need to wear one in public settings such as a supermarket or on a bus, as per [public health advice](#). Secondary school students must wear face masks indoors (medical exceptions apply). All adults will wear face masks, however, teachers may remove their masks if required to assist clear communication when teaching (for example, to meet the needs of a student with disability). All schools are well stocked with face masks.

Will face masks be provided for children?

If a child does not have their own face mask, the school will supply them with one.

Should a certain type of face mask be worn?

Surgical masks are recommended, but cloth masks are also acceptable. Please refer to [public health's mask wearing advice](#).

Vaccination

Do students need to be vaccinated to attend school?

No. Students do not need to be vaccinated to attend school. Students will not be separated into groups of those who are vaccinated and unvaccinated. It doesn't matter if your child only has one vaccine dose when school returns – all students, regardless of their vaccination status, will be allowed to attend school. [Public health](#) recommends that all children aged five years and older should be vaccinated.

Do parents need to be vaccinated to enter the school?

COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended for everyone 5 years and older.

Do school staff need to be vaccinated?

Yes. All Department of Education staff, including volunteers and contractors, will be vaccinated by 9 February 2022.

Physical distancing

Does my child need to follow physical distancing rules at school?

Physical distancing rules do not apply for students in schools, as per public health advice. All adults will maintain a physical distance of 1.5 metres from each other.

How is physical distancing managed on school buses?

As public transport is deemed an essential service, buses are exempt from physical distancing rules. However, students are encouraged to physically distance where possible. This may include:

- walking or cycling if undertaking a short trip
- keeping a physical distance of 1.5 metres from other passengers when queuing at bus stops
- choosing a seat away from others where possible – members of the same household may sit together
- not occupying the first row of seats nearest to the driver.

All school bus operators will continue frequent cleaning of bus interiors, particularly on high-touch surfaces. Drivers also wear masks and comply with public health advice.

Responding to COVID-19 cases

What happens if there is a confirmed COVID-19 case at our school?

There is a clear process in place to manage COVID-19 cases in schools. Similar to other illnesses, if there is a case in your child's classroom, monitor your child closely for symptoms. If your child is unwell, please keep them home and get them tested. Schools will communicate directly with families if there's a case at school. Public health will work closely with schools if there are increased cases in classrooms. For details, please refer to the [Return to school plan](#).

What is a close contact in a school context?

Children are not considered to be a close contact in a classroom setting. Similar to other illnesses, if there is a case in your child's classroom, monitor your child closely for symptoms. If they're unwell, they should stay at home and get tested. Schools will communicate directly with families if there's a case at school. If there are multiple cases in a single classroom, Public Health will assess if any students and staff are deemed as close contacts.

When will a school close?

Cases will be managed within schools, which will remain open subject to public health advice.

How will learning continue if there is an outbreak in my child's class?

If your child needs to isolate at home, their learning will be supported. Every effort will be made to support your child, and the core curriculum will be delivered at home. We are prepared for any learning at home periods, and our workforce planning will ensure all learners have access to a teacher. If an outbreak occurs – which under the [Return to school plan](#) will be considered when five or more cases occur in students and staff from a class within a seven day period – the school will communicate directly with families. In most cases, if this situation occurs, students and staff would be tested immediately, and then every two to three days – quarantining only if they have symptoms or a positive COVID-19 test result.

What if my child is unwell?

The most important action you can take is that if your child is [unwell](#), you should keep them home and ensure they [get tested](#).

What if my child has hay fever symptoms?

Hay fever symptoms are similar to cold, flu and COVID-19 symptoms, so it's hard to tell them apart without testing. If your child is experiencing hay fever symptoms such as a runny or blocked nose, sneezing, itchy eyes or a cough – even if they're mild symptoms – please keep them at home and ensure they [get tested](#). Your child can return to school once they've returned a negative COVID-19 test result. If symptoms worsen through the hay fever season, please contact your doctor.

What support will my child receive if they're required to quarantine or isolate?

If your child needs to isolate at home, their learning will be supported. Every effort will be made to support your child, and the core curriculum will be delivered at home. We are prepared for any learning at home periods, and our workforce planning will ensure all learners have access to a teacher.

What if I choose to keep my child at home, even if they're not sick?

All children who are well should attend school as they normally would. Normal attendance procedures apply, and regular school attendance is important. We know some parents and carers are feeling anxious as we see COVID-19 cases in the community, but attending school regularly is important for improved learning, and health and wellbeing outcomes. It is okay for children to return to school if they're not vaccinated, or not fully vaccinated. The health and safety of students, staff and the wider community is our highest priority. Measures are in place in our schools, libraries and child and family learning centres to create a COVID-safe learning environment.

What if there is insufficient staff to supervise students?

Proactive strategies are in place to ensure there are enough staff in schools. If needed, relief teachers, recently retired teachers or other departmental staff will be called on. For details, please refer to the [Return to school plan](#).

What happens if a parent or carer is being tested or a confirmed COVID-19 case?

If a parent or carer is being tested or a confirmed COVID-19 case, please follow [public health advice](#). In a case like this, your child would be considered a household contact and would need to isolate at home, [test for COVID-19](#) and await a negative result before returning to school. If your child needs to isolate at home, and they're feeling well, their learning will be supported.

Can I keep my child at home if they, or someone in my family, has pre-existing medical conditions?

Parents and carers must provide written advice if their child or someone in their family is medically compromised. They should then talk to their school about how their child can continue their learning.

Where can I get tested?

Refer to [Tasmania's COVID-19 website](#) for more information on COVID-19 testing.

Site visitors

Will parents and carers be able to go onto school sites?

Yes, parents and carers can go onto school sites. However, schools will make local decisions on site access and will communicate any requirements to their school community.

We are encouraging parents and carers to *Stop, Drop and Go* (if appropriate) as we are trying to limit the amount of people on school sites as possible.

If you are entering the school site, you need to ensure you are practising COVID-safe behaviours such as physically distancing between adults. If you need to enter a school building, ensure you are wearing a face mask, washing your hands and using hand sanitiser, and checking in using the Check in Tas app.

Parents and carers do not need to do a rapid antigen test (RAT) before entering school sites if they have no symptoms.

COVID-19 vaccination is strongly recommended.

Can volunteers attend schools?

Yes. Volunteers can support schools as they normally would – but would need approval from the principal first. Volunteers must be vaccinated and should adhere to all COVID-safe practices at school.

Are contractors and other visitors allowed on school sites?

At this time, non-essential visitors will be limited. Contractors are allowed but must be vaccinated and should adhere to all COVID-safe practices at school.

Can community groups use school facilities?

Yes. Schools can still be used for external events with a COVID safety plan in place.

School activities

Can my child borrow library books?

Yes. Library books can still be borrowed – just ensure you’ve washed your hands before and after handling them.

Can school sport and competitions take place?

Yes. School sport and competitions will continue with COVID-safe measures in place. If the situation changes, this will be re-visited on a school-by-school basis.

Are rehearsals and performance allowed for instrumental music programs, ensembles and choirs?

Yes. School music will continue with COVID-safe measures in place. If the situation changes, this will be re-visited on a school-by-school basis.

Can school functions be held?

Yes. School functions will continue with COVID-safe measures in place. If the situation changes, this will be re-visited on a school-by-school basis.

Can students travel cross-campus?

Yes, if necessary.

Can students attend other school sites?

Yes. If students are required to attend another school for an essential curriculum-related reason (for example, auditions or placements), this is permitted.

Can home visits still go ahead?

Yes. Schools and Child and Family Learning Centre staff can undertake home visits where essential and ensure COVID-safe measures are in place.

Can schools hold parent/teacher meetings?

Yes. Parent/teacher meetings can continue with COVID-safe measures in place.

Will school photos still go ahead?

Yes. School photos will continue with COVID-safe measures in place. If the situation changes, this will be re-visited on a school-by-school basis.

Do parents need to pay school levies in 2022?

Yes. However, the Student Assistance Scheme (STAS) is available to families who hold a Health Care Card or equivalent which provides levy waivers to eligible families. For more information visit the [Department of Education website](#) or contact stas@education.tas.gov.au.

Can interstate and international school trips still go ahead?

All interstate and international school trips will be postponed at this stage.

Are Launching into Learning sessions going ahead?

No. Launching into Learning sessions will be paused for the first five weeks of Term 1, 2022. We are looking at options for delivering some Launching into Learning activities online – updates will be provided.

Are Child and Family Learning Centres (CFLCs) still open?

Yes. Child and Family Learning Centres are still open with COVID-safe measures in place.

Are schools still allowing their facilities to be hired for external events?

Yes. Schools can still be used for external events with a COVID safety plan in place.

Can physical education classes still go ahead?

Yes. Physical education classes will continue with COVID-safe measures in place. If the situation changes, this will be re-visited on a school-by-school basis.

Will the canteen still be open?

Yes. The canteen will still be open with COVID-safe measures in place.

Are playgrounds and sandpits still able to be used?

Yes. Playgrounds and sandpits can still be used with COVID-safe measures in place.

Can school camps and excursions still go ahead?

Yes. School camps and excursions can continue with COVID-safe measures in place.

Can students still undertake work experience?

Yes. Students can continue to undertake work experience provided all parties (students, parents and carers, schools and workplaces) are supportive. It will be subject to the normal procedures, including risk management and assessment practices and obtaining parental approval. Site requirements at the workplace will also be considered.

Are swimming and water safety programs allowed to run?

Yes. Swimming and water safety programs can continue with COVID-safe measures in place. If the situation changes, this will be re-visited on a school-by-school basis.

Are Department of Education pools still open?

Yes. School pools are still operating with a Pool Safety Plan in place.

Can School Association meetings still go ahead?

Yes. On-site School Association meetings can still go ahead with COVID-safe measures in place. However, online meetings are preferred.

Can school assemblies still go ahead, and are parents allowed to attend?

Large gatherings are not recommended at this stage.

Can schools hold larger school-based activities?

Large gatherings are not recommended at this stage.

Can school celebration and social events still go ahead?

Large gatherings are not recommended at this stage.

Support for students with disability and medically vulnerable

What support is available for my child with disability or who is medically vulnerable?

Individual learning and medical plans for students with disability that have complex health needs will be updated if required by schools, in consultation with parents and carers. Parents may also proactively contact their school to discuss their child's needs.

My child cannot wear a mask, what should they do?

We acknowledge that there will be some students who, through no fault of their own, are not able to wear a mask at times. Please discuss this directly with your school principal prior to school starting.

Early childhood education and care services

Can I send my child to early childhood education and care services?

Yes, childcare programs and Out of School Hours Care will operate with COVID-safe measures in place.

Are there any changes to childcare fees?

There was a return to the full Child Care Subsidy and Additional Child Care Subsidy system in July 2020. The Government doesn't set childcare fees. Services set their own fees. Parents then pay the gap between the total of the fees charged for a session of care minus the amount of Child Care Subsidy paid for the care session. Families experiencing financial hardship may be eligible for Additional Child Care Subsidy. Refer to the [Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment website](#) for more information.

Are children in early childhood education and care required to wear face masks?

No.

Where can I find out more about early childhood education and care services?

Please refer to the [Education and Care website](#) for parent frequently asked questions.

Kinder

What will Kinder look like on the first day?

Kinder will operate as normal, with COVID-safe measures in place. Parents can help their child settle into the day. Please contact your school for additional details and arrangements.

Years 11 and 12

How will senior secondary students be supported?

Face-to-face learning will continue with COVID-safe measures in place. Years 11 and 12 students will have access to additional support through Virtual Learning Tasmania and online tutorials.

Can vocational placements and school-based apprenticeships continue?

Yes. Vocational placements and school-based apprenticeships will continue with COVID-safe measures in place. Site requirements at the workplace will also be considered.

Learning at home

How does learning at home work?

If your child needs to isolate at home, their learning will be supported. Every effort will be made to support your child, and the core curriculum will be delivered at home. We are prepared for any learning at home periods, and our workforce planning will ensure all learners have access to a teacher.

What is a Virtual Learning Centre?

Where possible, schools will support learners to come to school and learn under the supervision of their classroom teacher. When this is not possible, schools will communicate to parents about the resources to support learners and this may include the Virtual Learning Centre. Access to this Centre will be available from the start of the school year, and parents can speak with their school about access to this learning if they wish to before school starts.

Are there any resources available to support parents with learning at home?

Yes. Please refer to the [learning at home parent tip sheets](#) and [supporting learning information](#). Remember – you are not expected or required to be an expert or trained educator. You know your child's strengths and interests, so you can create reasonable learning expectations with support from your child's school.

How will students with disability and vulnerable students be supported with learning at home?

Schools will work directly with the family to update the student's individual learning plan.

What if we're unable to access learning materials?

Every reasonable effort will be made to provide material to the students where appropriate.

Wellbeing support

What support is available for student wellbeing?

It's normal to feel overwhelmed and anxious about everything you're hearing about COVID-19. It's important to talk to your child about COVID-19 and what you can do as a family to help slow the spread. [Emerging Minds](#), [Beyond Blue](#) and [Red Cross](#) offer useful tips for parents on talking to children about COVID-19. [Wellbeing support](#) for students, parents and carers is also available.

It's important to exercise regularly to maintain physical and mental wellbeing. Establishing daily routines is important too, by incorporating healthy meals and snacks and maintaining a regular bedtime. Please seek professional help if needed.

Support services include [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 551 800, [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14 and [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 224 636.

I'm feeling anxious about return to school. Where can I get support?

This may be an anxious time for parents. Know that there is a clear plan in place to manage COVID-19 in schools and early education and care services. Proactive measures are in place to keep schools COVID-safe. For details, please refer to the [Return to school plan](#). Always make sure you get your information from a credible source. The Department of Education or your school will provide updates to families as soon as new information becomes available. [Wellbeing support](#) for students, parents and carers is also available.

How can I access health professionals in our school?

School health nurses, social workers, psychologists and speech and language therapists continue to work with schools and students to support their wellbeing needs. Please contact your school to seek support or a referral to school health professionals. Professional support staff and school health nurses have developed new ways of working that allow for support to be provided to students and families through phone calls, text messages, email and letters. Face-to-face support may be provided in some instances for students on site where physical distancing can be maintained.

Further information

Where can I find out more about COVID-19?

For the latest information visit:

- [Tasmanian Government Coronavirus website](#)
- [Australian Government Department of Health website](#)
- [Tasmanian Government COVID-19 vaccination website](#).

For general COVID-19 enquiries, contact the [Tasmanian Public Health Hotline](#) on 1800 671 738.

For vaccination information, contact the [National Coronavirus Helpline](#) on 1800 020 080.

For Catholic or Independent school related COVID enquiries, contact [Catholic Education Tasmania](#) on 03 6210 8888 or [Independent Schools Tasmania](#) on 03 6224 0125.

If you can't find an answer to your school related COVID enquiry [here](#), contact the Department of Education COVID Support Hotline at COVID19support@education.tas.gov.au or on 1800 816 057.

If you need support translating or interpreting this information, contact the [Translating and Interpreting Service](#) on 131 450. [Alternative language versions](#) and [accessibility information](#) is available.

Advice for staff is available on the [Department of Education's intranet](#) (link accessible only by staff).

Is there a Department of Education COVID hotline for parents to call?

Yes. If you can't find an answer to your school related COVID enquiry [here](#), contact the Department of Education COVID Support Hotline at COVID19support@education.tas.gov.au or on 1800 816 057.