

MINIMISING RISK OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION: UPDATED ADVICE FOR NSW SCHOOL COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITY SPORTS ORGANISATIONS

24 September 2020

I write to thank the NSW school and community sports communities for their considerable support in managing the risks of COVID-19 transmission following my advice of 14 August. This has helped protect the community and minimise impacts on students preparing for their HSC exams.

Schools should continue to exclude students and staff with even mild symptoms of COVID-19 and encourage them to seek testing immediately. Parents of symptomatic children will still need to provide evidence of a negative test result on their child's return to school.

In the case of seasonal allergic rhinitis or other condition that presents similarly to COVID-19 and in the presence of continuing symptoms, the child will need a negative COVID-19 test result and a letter from their GP confirming that the child should be permitted to return to school. If the child's symptoms change from their usual symptoms, repeat COVID-19 testing should be performed.

Non-essential adults should continue to be excluded from school unless involved directly in delivery of curriculum activities or health services. All teachers, coaches and volunteers should continue to ensure they maintain physical distancing during, before and after school or sporting activities. Good hand hygiene practices should continue to be supported along with the other measures outlined in the school and community sports COVID-19 Safety Plan.

Given the current level of community transmission of COVID-19 in NSW, I am pleased to advise the following changes to NSW Health advice for schools (and preschools run by schools) and community sports organisations, which may take effect from Saturday 26 September:

School and community sports activities

From Saturday 26 September, interregional community sporting competitions may recommence without restricting these activities to regions or zones, where there is a COVID-19 Safety Plan for the school or community sport activity in place. More than one parent may now attend community sporting activities if physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres can be maintained between people that are not from the same household. Ensure strict compliance with all other elements of the COVID-19 Safety Plan. Non-essential adults should continue to be excluded from sporting activities held during the normal school day.

School and community sports organisations and participants should continue to avoid shared travel arrangements such as car pooling, and to minimise gatherings before and after the event.

Group singing and musical groups

Group singing and chanting remains a high-risk activity for transmission should someone involved be infected. In order to mitigate this risk, a small group of up to 5 people may sing together in one area if all singers face forwards and not towards each other, have physical distancing of 1.5 metres between each other and any other performers, and 5 metres distancing from all other people in front including the audience and conductor. Group singing of up to 5 people should only take place in a large, well-ventilated (preferably outdoor) setting.

In primary school and preschool settings, in-class educational activities such as group repetition, chanting, recitation or singing may occur, provided this takes place outdoors or in a well-ventilated indoor environment. Teachers must maintain 1.5m physical distancing for these in-class educational activities. This activity is permitted due to the importance of these activities in children's education and development, and the lower transmission risk between primary students.

Musical instrument ensembles may continue. Players of non-reeded woodwind instruments (such as flutes and recorders) should maintain a physical distance of 3 metres from others in the direction of air flow from their instruments, and 1.5m in all other directions. Players of all other musical instruments (including reeded woodwind instruments) should maintain a physical distance of 1.5m between each other and the audience / conductor. Ensembles and other musical groups should rehearse and perform outdoors or in large, well-ventilated indoor spaces.

School related social events

Schools may proceed with planning graduation ceremonies and school formals. These events may be held any time in Term 4 for primary schools, but secondary schools should schedule these events for November 12 onwards to minimise the potential impact on HSC exams. Schools should use the COVID-19 Safety Plan guidance for graduation ceremonies and formals to plan these events including limiting the number of family members or friends attending, such as to parents only. NSW Health recommends that other school related social events such as dinners, fundraisers, fetes and BBQs that involve parents and other adults should not proceed in Term 4.

Staff professional development activities

Professional development for staff should not be conducted face-to-face unless absolutely necessary. Staff gatherings should be minimised and, where they must occur, limited to the minimum number of people required to achieve educational outcomes. Staff should also be required to maintain social distancing at all times, including in tea rooms and staff rooms.

Overnight activities

COVID-19 is transmitted easily in household-like settings. Overnight accommodation settings where facilities are shared by people from different households and children require additional adult supervision and interaction, such as camps, may have an increased risk of COVID-19 transmission should someone attending be infected.

As the COVID-19 situation can change quickly, schools, facilities and overnight event organisers should:

- consider the level of community transmission in the local community just before the overnight event is to be held, along with the other risks associated with the event as part of a risk assessment process
- pay particular attention to excluding anyone with symptoms before the event, and
- consider arrangements for isolating and testing anyone who develops symptoms during the event.

The risk of transmission is likely to be lower in primary school children. The risk of disruption of HSC exams may be higher if these events are held for secondary school students and one of these students or staff members becomes infected.

Overnight activities may take place so long as accommodation facilities and overnight event organisers develop and implement a COVID-19 Safety Plan and event organisers consider the issues above. COVID-19 Safety Plan guidance is available from the NSW Government website for caravan parks and camping grounds, and for hotels and accommodation facilities.

September-October school holiday activities

There is currently no restriction on travel within NSW for people who live in NSW, however people who become unwell should cancel or defer their plans to travel until a negative COVID-19 test is obtained. Take care whilst travelling to maintain physical distancing wherever practical, use masks where physical distancing cannot be maintained or in crowded or poorly ventilated settings, and regularly practice good hand hygiene. Avoid shared travel arrangements such as car pooling. Take extra care if you're around vulnerable people. Outdoor settings generally present a lower risk of transmission than indoor settings, so try to arrange for school holiday gatherings to take place outdoors as much as possible and remember that outdoor gatherings are still limited to 20 people (apart from community sport activities with a COVID-19 Safety Plan).

These updated measures will assist us to achieve the NSW Government's aim to achieve no community transmission in NSW. NSW Health will regularly review and update this advice if the COVID-19 situation changes. I thank you and your communities for your support and ongoing attention to providing a COVID safe environment for all children, students and staff.

Please refer to the NSW Department of Education, NSW Health or nsw.gov.au websites for further information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Chant'.

Dr Kerry Chant
Chief Health Officer
NSW Ministry of Health

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