

# Enhancing safety at schools

This fact sheet is current as at 17 September 2020.

## Purpose and background

This fact sheet provides current research about the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and practical guidance and advice for school leaders to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children, teachers and support staff at school as we transition to a new normal.

## What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a new virus. Symptoms include fever, coughing, a sore throat and shortness of breath. The virus can spread from person to person, but good hygiene, cleaning and physical distancing can prevent infection.

## Health and safety

The NT Department of Health continues to advise that it is safe for schools in the NT to remain open and for students and staff to attend school. Schools are an essential service and every child should have access to education during this time in a safe and supported manner.

Decisions about schools will continue to be informed by advice from the NT Department of Health.

There are currently no known cases of COVID-19 in the NT. Current and previous measures taken including border restrictions, strict quarantine requirements and biosecurity measures have so far resulted in a low level of infection in the NT. This places the NT in a different position to other states and territories that may have experienced a higher rate of infection, and therefore may have implemented different measures throughout the pandemic. The NT Government implemented a [Roadmap to the New Normal](#), which set out a three stage recovery process with additional activities, services and functions permitted at each stage. Stage 3 of the Roadmap commenced on 5 June 2020.

Staff are encouraged to continue to take a responsible and cautious approach to support a safe and healthy school environment. This includes not attending school if you are feeling unwell, if you are awaiting a COVID-19 test result, if you have been directed to self-isolate or quarantine, or if you have travelled to a place identified by the [Northern Territory Chief Health Officer as a COVID-19 hotspot](#) in the last 14 days. Schools are encouraged to undertake similar precautions for visitors as set out in the COVID-19 School Operating Guidelines.

## Help stop the spread and stay healthy

Schools are exempt from many of the current and previous directions of the Chief Health Officer, including those regarding mass gatherings (internal and external), and the closure of public playgrounds

and libraries. Where the Chief Health Officer does issue a direction that applies to schools, schools will be required to comply. These directions will be communicated to schools if they arise.

The NT [Roadmap](#) is underpinned by three principles: personal responsibility, physical distancing, and hygiene. In our schools' context, this means:

1. Continuing to reiterate that all members of our school community must take **personal responsibility** to follow the principles in the Roadmap, and encourage their friends and families to do so as well. This includes ensuring that unwell people are not at school, including students, staff, parents, visitors and volunteers;
2. Continuing to take appropriate measures to maximise [physical distancing](#) in the school environment wherever possible.
3. Continuing to enhance safety in the school environment by practicing, and supporting students to practice, **good hygiene**.

Physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning are explored in more detail below.

## Physical distancing

Schools are exempt from current and previous directions from the NT Chief Health Officer related to mass gatherings, proximity (1.5m between people) and density (4 sqm per person in a single, undivided inside area). These directions do however provide a useful guide for school operations to further enhance safety.

For further information see the [Physical Distancing in Schools Fact Sheet](#).

## Hygiene

Everyone must practice good hygiene to protect against infection and prevent the virus spreading. Hand hygiene, cough etiquette and environmental cleaning are effective ways to enhance safety for staff and students.

### Handwashing

Good handwashing practices should be implemented throughout the school. Hands should be washed with soap and running water for 20 seconds, particularly before and after eating and after going to the toilet. Build practices into daily routines in the classroom to encourage good practice, for example the start and end of the school day, before and after recess and lunch. Display promotional materials at schools to encourage good handwashing, particularly in toilets and places where food is produced/consumed.

### Cough and sneeze etiquette and face touching

Encourage and promote good practices – i.e. “catch coughs and sneezes with your elbow or in a tissue that you put straight in the bin” and reducing touching faces, particularly eyes, nose and mouth.

Bins placed in classrooms should be emptied regularly throughout the day.

## Other practices

Do not share food or drink. Communal water fountains/bubblers can be used for filling bottles but not for direct drinking from taps. Where relevant, promote strictest hygiene among food preparation (canteen) staff and their close contacts.

Where possible, do not share devices or workstations, or wipe them down between users.

## Routine care

In supporting students with additional needs and young children, particularly where bodily fluids may be encountered, standard precautions are advised:

- Wash hands with soap and water and dry on single use paper towel or use hand sanitiser before and after performing routine care
- Use gloves, remove them safely and dispose of them immediately in a rubbish bin which is regularly cleared
- Wipe all surfaces and equipment after single use with disinfectant
- Continue to follow adjustments documented in plans for individual students.

Additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as medical face masks, is not required unless such precautions are usually adopted in the routine care of an individual or young person. Non-medical face coverings are not recommended as their use has the potential to create more harm than good.

## First Aid

Standard precautions should be adopted when providing first aid, for example gloves and an apron to use when dealing with blood or body fluids/substances. Always wash hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser before and after providing first aid.

## Support

To support these hygiene practices ensure adequate supplies of soap and running water, toilet paper, tissues and hand sanitiser. Hand sanitiser and/or handwashing stations should be available at the entrance to every school and in every classroom.

Ensure tissues, cleaning supplies and rubbish bins are available with frequent waste disposal taking place; display promotional materials and teach practices in the classroom.

Every classroom or learning space should have running water and soap and/or hand sanitizer, tissues and rubbish bins that are cleared daily, personal cleaning supplies e.g. to wipe down keyboards between users such as surface disinfectant and paper towels, or disinfectant wipes.

If schools are having any difficulty obtaining hygiene or cleaning products, please contact the DoE Logistics team at [supplies.doe@nt.gov.au](mailto:supplies.doe@nt.gov.au).

## Cleaning

Coronaviruses can survive on some surfaces for many hours but are readily inactivated by cleaning and disinfection.

To reduce the spread of viruses or germs in schools through cleaning:

- Ensure thorough and regular cleaning of the school, including disinfecting commonly touched or frequently shared surfaces (playgrounds, doors, door handles, handrails; light, fan and air conditioner switches; phones, remote controls; elevators, taps, front counters, desks and tables).
- Clean and disinfect frequently used objects such as phones, keyboards, mice, touchscreens, photocopiers and sports equipment regularly with detergent solution, disinfectant surface cleaners and paper towels, or detergent/disinfectant wipes.
- Sick bays, bathrooms, food preparation and eating areas and play equipment should also be regularly cleaned.
- Cleaning is thoroughly explored in detail in the [COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfection Advice Fact Sheet](#). This fact sheet may be provided to school cleaners to clarify cleaning work during this period.

Buses operated by schools should be cleaned daily. Buses used to transport students with additional needs should be cleaned twice daily.

## Support

All schools in the Northern Territory have received a grant to enhance their cleaning practices for the remainder of 2020.

In addition to in classrooms, personal cleaning supplies should be provided near photocopiers, computer labs and near sports equipment storage. e.g. to wipe down surfaces between users. These supplies may include surface disinfectant and paper towels, or disinfectant wipes; or detergent and sponges for sports equipment.

If schools are having any difficulty obtaining cleaning products, please contact the DoE Logistics team at [supplies.doe@nt.gov.au](mailto:supplies.doe@nt.gov.au).

## In the event of a suspected/confirmed case

Where there is a suspected or confirmed case in a school environment, schools should follow their pandemic plan, and contact the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080 for further advice. The Helpline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## Communication

Continuing clear and consistent communication will help students, teachers and parents understand we all have a part to play in slowing the spread of COVID-19.

Schools should:

- continue to keep parents informed about actions their school is taking through their normal channels of communication;
- display age-appropriate materials around the school with key messages relating to physical distancing and hygiene (posters and other resources are available [here](#)).