

## Return to School webinar

25/01/2022

### Questions asked but not answered at the webinar

Reponses from NSW Department of Education

**For the most up-to-date COVID-19 information in NSW schools, refer to the advice for families page: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/advice-for-families>**

#### Guidelines & Rules

**When will NSW Education be communicating applicable health protocols applying in their residential Ag High Schools to the schools and parents?**

**Can weekly boarding students return home on weekends? Can parents help their first-time boarders settle into dorms?**

Information relating to boarding schools was released at the start of Term 1. Boarding schools should follow all general COVID-19 guidance for schools, as well as the specific guidelines for boarding schools available at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/advice-for-families/boarding-schools0>

**What will happen after the first four weeks?**

Information will be provided by schools and the NSW Department of Education. Visit the advice for families page for the latest COVID-19 information in schools: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/advice-for-families>

**What is the department doing to enforce existing rules? Some teachers at our school were not wearing masks in term 4 and they were not opening windows. My husband is immunosuppressed, how can we fix this?**

**Can Principals vary the rules?**

All school staff are required to wear surgical masks indoors. Secondary school students are required to wear masks indoors and it is strongly recommended for primary school students.

If a student or staff member has a physical illness, mental health condition or disability that makes mask-wearing unsuitable then they may provide proof of exemption for not wearing a mask.

**Is there a maximum number of days my child can be absent from school for the year? Will they be penalised if they are absent for extended periods of time?**

We understand that some students' attendance will be affected by COVID-19, particularly if they contract COVID and/or have multiple household contacts. Schools will work with the student and their family to ensure that the student's learning is able to continue with as little disruption as possible.

**What is the potential timeline of when P&C meetings can be conducted face-to-face on school grounds?**

P&C meetings can occur on school grounds after school hours. It is the responsibility of the P&C President or delegate to make sure all members attending onsite are complying with the current Public Health Order, which includes the requirement that all workers and volunteers attending a school site be double vaccinated.

## Positive & Recovered COVID-19 Cases

**What is the situation for children that have recently recovered from COVID in the last 30 days?**

**What is the situation if there is an outbreak in the school but my child has recently recovered from Covid in the last 30 days.**

**What if my child is still positive after the 7 days isolation but showing no symptoms, thus RAT test shows positive. Can I still send them to school?**

It is recommended that staff and students who return to school after recovering from COVID-19 do not participate in rapid antigen test surveillance for 28 days (four weeks after recovery) following release from self-isolation. This is due to NSW Health advice that people who have recovered from COVID-19 have a low risk of contracting it again in the following 28 days. After 28 days (from week five after recovery) staff and students may resume participation in RAT surveillance.

**If teachers' own kids get COVID but they are RAT negative, have no symptoms and can have their child adequately cared for, do they need to isolate for 7 days as a close contact or can they go to work?**

Teachers who are household close contacts or have symptoms will need to follow NSW Health advice regarding isolation. Visit <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/management/self-isolation-covid-and-close>

**How will you monitor what is happening with positive cases at schools or in the community when the data collections systems have broken down, and only hospitalisations seem to be counted with any confidence now?**

**Will the department be sharing publicly the number of schools with positive cases? Given that so many schools closed last year, and the numbers were not clearly shared by the department, how can parents make a reasonable risk assessment for their situation.**

**What if there is a large number of children at one school positive? Will they then home school the entire class/ school?**

A number of COVID-smart measures have been developed with NSW Health to minimise transmission and keep schools open. Schools will inform their community when there is a positive case in the school and guide families on NSW Health advice, including monitoring for symptoms. Parents should expect regular communication with details of any impacted year groups or cohorts.

## Public Transport

**If children have had COVID and recovering but during the term parents get COVID. What arrangements can be put in place for travel to school when no public transport is available?**

**How will you manage cohorts in the country areas where a large proportion of students travel on the bus? Bus companies need to be given clear directions about masks and ventilation.**

Clear health guidelines have been developed by NSW Health to minimise transmission on public transport. Masks must be worn by anyone aged 12 years and over. For travel advice and information visit <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/stay-safe/travelling-on-public-transport>

## Remote Learning

**Is there any option to have online learning from home if we concern about our child might be getting infected at school?**

**If there are online modules available, could it not be made optional for parents whether they want to go through the RAT testing twice a week (particularly with the younger cohorts) or to ease the need for teachers on site?**

**Could you please expand on remote/online learning options, these should definitely be available from the first day! Thank you!**

**As a parent will my son be supported to learn from home if I choose to keep him home? We live with my father who is currently undergoing radiation treatment and he also has heart and lung complications?**

**Is the school obliged to provide working from home material to parents?**

**How will families be supported if they feel that the current plan is unacceptable and not sufficient for a safe return? Will families be punished if they keep their kids home?**

We know students learn better in the classroom and the social, emotional and mental health benefits of face-to-face learning for students are well evidenced.

The health and wellbeing of our students and staff are our priority and our COVID-19 measures are designed to help keep schools open and students learning in the classroom.

Learning from home options will be supported for short periods when face-to-face learning is not possible. Learning from home options are available at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/learning-from-home/learning-at-home>

## Rapid Antigen Tests & Reporting

**After the first 4 weeks, where can parents get the RAT, given none are available from pharmacies.**

**Why are RATs only recommended, but not mandated? Other countries around the world have successfully implemented mandatory testing for school kids. If not mandatory, will the percentage of tests per week/class be communicated, so parents can assess the risk?**

**I have witnessed several friends test negative to RAT test but positive to PCR. These RAT tests appear not to be accurate. Is there concern about the effectiveness of the RAT testing?**

**If RATs are not mandated, how do we know the rate of testing per cohort?**

**What if your child has symptoms and repeatedly tests negative on RAT and PCR test?**

**Can vaccines mask a positive?**

**The current shortage of RATs in the community means these have significant resale value. What will be done to reduce black market on-sale?**

**Is there a phone number where we can report parents who continue to send their children to school after getting a positive test?**

**Do school staff administer RAT tests to students? If so, what staff?**

## **How will the school know if a child has taken either a Negative or Positive RAT test before attending school?**

Rapid antigen tests (RATs) will be provided to all students and staff by their schools. For the first four weeks of term, we recommend students take a RAT twice a week on mornings before school.

- If your child has even mild COVID-19 symptoms, get them tested with a RAT or PCR (nose and throat swab) test.
- They must isolate until they receive a negative test result, in line with health protocols.
- If symptoms continue, they should stay at home and take another RAT in 24 hours or have a PCR test. If the second RAT or initial PCR test result is negative, or another diagnosis is confirmed such as hay fever, they can return to school.

If a student or staff members receives a positive RAT test, they need to

- record the positive RAT result through the [Service NSW website](#) or [Service NSW app](#)
- notify the school of the positive RAT or PCR test result as soon as possible
- follow NSW Health advice to isolate for 7 days.

## **Masks**

**N95 masks have been recognised as best practice around the world. Why are we recommending surgical masks rather than N95 masks?**

**You are recommending surgical masks now instead of cloth masks, are cloth masks with PM2.5 filters still allowed?**

**Recent evidence suggests masks substantially reduce transmission even in well-ventilated spaces - why has the department chosen not to mandate these for primary students, given this has been successfully done for over a year in other countries?**

**Many professionals are warning about the dangers of mask wearing for long periods of time. Can students who have recently had Covid and who are clearly not at risk of getting the virus or spreading it anytime soon be exempt from mask wearing?**

**Are the teachers going to help kindies to keep the mask on properly? They tend to drop or not wear it for long.**

**Health recommendations are that the surgical masks should not be worn longer the 4 hours.**

**How are the schools going to handle the disposal of masks on school grounds bearing in mind these are classified as a bio-hazard?**

**Can I donate P2 or N95 masks to the teachers at our local school?**

All primary and secondary school staff are required to wear surgical masks indoors. Vented or cloth masks should not be worn. If required, surgical masks will be available at schools for use.

Secondary school students will be provided with surgical masks as a backup when needed, which they must wear indoors. Masks are also strongly encouraged in outdoor settings where you cannot physically distance.

Primary school students are strongly recommended to wear well-fitted masks indoors and in outdoors settings where you cannot physically distance.

Students can remove their mask when eating, exercising or playing a musical instrument.

Refer to the NSW Government's face mask rules page for the most up-to-date information:

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/stay-safe/rules/face-mask-rules>

## Vaccinations/Boosters

**Can students under 18 years old have the booster?**

**Do parents and volunteers still need to be vaccinated to attend school sites?**

**What if the child with high risk is too young to be vaccinated?**

**Does the school need our kid's vaccination status info?**

Booster vaccinations are available and recommended for anyone 16 years and older who received their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at least three months prior. Refer to the NSW Health Booster vaccination webpage for more information - <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/vaccination/get-vaccinated/boosters>

Parents and carers volunteering on school sites are required to be fully vaccinated.

Vaccinations are not mandatory for students. However, anyone eligible is encouraged to get vaccinated. The department does not monitor the vaccination status of children.

Visit the vaccination requirements for school sites webpage for the latest information:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/advice-for-families/vaccination-requirements-for-school-sites>

## Mental Health & Wellbeing

**Are there any allowances being made to make sure any anxiety felt by children in being at school before they are fully vaccinated is being addressed? If a child is struggling with worry, can they learn from home until they are fully vaxxed?**

**The return to school is putting children of parents with medical conditions under psychological/emotional strain as they fear bringing the virus home and putting mum or dad into hospital (or worse). How can we reassure them that this can't happen with the steps that are being put into place?**

**Is anything being done to improve the children's access to school counsellors or wellbeing officers with the COVID19?**

The [Wellbeing for students and families page](#) contains links to a range of mental health and wellbeing resources for students and families including where to get urgent help, tips and resources, and a list of organisations that are available to provide mental health support.

If students are concerned about their mental health, wellbeing or safety, they can also approach the following school staff for support:

- Year Adviser
- [Student Support Officer](#)
- [School Counsellor / Psychologist](#)
- Wellbeing Nurse

- School Chaplain
- Classroom teacher
- Head Teacher, Wellbeing.

## Extra Curriculum Activities

**So, as a parent, I have the right to advise the school that my child will not participate in an outdoor activity that I don't want my kid to participate in and the school will not force it down us? Please clarify.**

If you would not like your child to participate in outdoor activities due to medical concerns, you should speak to your GP and provide your child's school with this advice.