



**Catholic  
Education**  
Diocese of Cairns

*Learning with Faith and Vision*

# **COVID-19 Operating guidelines for Cairns Catholic Education**

**8<sup>th</sup> February 2022**



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been developed to meet the challenging juxtaposition of general easing of restrictions, along with a heightened sense of COVID safety, due to the current wave of COVID community transmission. It is envisaged that these guidelines will see further easing in the near future, once the high community transmission rates subside.

As we continue to navigate a changing COVID-19 landscape, principals will need to make decisions that are appropriate to their local context, while aligning with Queensland Health advice.

### 1.1 KEY MESSAGES

For the immediate future, schools will need to be mindful of a number of measures, designed to limit the impact of COVID-19 on our students, staff, community and school operations.

- Physical distancing between adults will be critical over the next few weeks.
- Continue to follow and enforce the government mask mandate.
- Many students and staff will get COVID-19, and staff unavailability may be an issue. Flexibility, agility and understanding will be key.
- Schools and offices are outside the scope of 'close contacts', so partial or full school closures are highly unlikely.
- There is no need for the school to notify staff or the school community of confirmed cases, however we should keep a record of cases to identify any concerning trends and engage Public Health assistance where necessary.
- Queensland Government directives and guidelines remain the minimum standard and where possible and/or practical, standards above these minimum standards are encouraged.
- If students are unwell or show symptoms of cold or flu, they must not come to school, regardless if they have a negative RAT (Rapid Antigen Test) result. If the student is unwell at school, the parent caregivers should be contacted to take the student home.
- If staff are unwell or showing signs of cold or flu, they must not come to work, even if they have a negative RAT result.

## 2 CONFIRMED CASE AND CLOSE CONTACT MANAGEMENT

For students, please see [here](#).

For staff, please see [here](#).

## 3 STUDENTS

All students, even those who may be 18 years or older, remain subject to the operating guidelines in place for all students. Whilst there is a mandate for all workers to be vaccinated, this does not apply to students.

Some medically vulnerable students may need to learn at home, and adjustments will need to be in place to support these students to continue their learning in consultation with parents and carers.

### 3.1 COVID POSITIVE OR QUARANTINE STUDENTS

To assist the school in managing cases within the school community, parents and carers are required to notify the school if their child tests positive for COVID. Schools should record the absence in eMinerva as per usual but should also note the word “COVID” in the notes section.

Students who are positive with COVID or are required to quarantine due to being a close contact may return to school once they have satisfied public health quarantine or isolation requirements. There is no need to provide evidence of negative tests etc. to attend school once quarantine or isolation requirements have been met.

### 3.2 UNWELL STUDENTS

If students are unwell or show symptoms of cold or flu, they must not come to school; or if already at school, the students should be kept in a safe and comfortable area away from others, and the parent or caregivers should be contacted to take the student home. If the student has flu like symptoms, they school may offer the parent or carer a RAT to take home and administer to the child. This will be dependant upon school stock, and whether the parent wishes to take a RAT kit.

If students are at home and unwell with flulike symptoms, then they must not attend school, but they will get priority access to RATs under the new [Qld Government Return to School Plan](#).

**Please note: Students who return a negative RAT result still must not attend school if they are unwell or are under a quarantine or isolation requirement.**

Students staying home when sick is likely to have a positive impact on attendance levels, as a reduced incidence of an illness in the school translates into a reduced likelihood of other students being away sick. So rather than being a competing priority, these two-work hand in hand. Ensuring students stay at home when sick should not just be considered a COVID response, but rather a logical step to improve the wellbeing and academic performance of our students.

It should also be noted that the requirement for students to stay at home when unwell is a [legal directive](#), and alternative measures such as wearing of face masks etc. is not considered a suitable option.

### 3.3 STUDENT SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Schools are required to monitor student attendance and respond in accordance with normal policy and procedures. After a period of home learning, where schools identify students who have not returned to on-site learning, it is important for schools to follow-up with parents or carers to discuss reasons the student has not returned and to implement supports to ensure attendance as per the [CES Directive for Unexplained absences](#).

Concerns about children at risk of significant harm should continue to be reported to Child Safety in accordance with Cairns Catholic Education [student protection requirements](#).

### 3.4 STUDENT SUPPORT

Students unable to participate in site-based learning programs due to medical or quarantine reasons should be supported by their school, just as they would in the case of any extended student medical absence.

Schools can determine the most appropriate approach, taking into account the expected duration of absence, the student’s learning needs, available tools and resources, and the school’s established approach to supporting continuity of learning.

## 4 PRINCIPALS

In the opening weeks of Term 1, minimising staff contact will be key. Large face to face sessions could have significant impact on school operations if staff are COVID positive, so principals should work to manage this appropriately. Whilst staff getting COVID may be inevitable, we can manage this to reduce the impact on staff, students, our community and school operations.

It is important for principals and leadership teams to actively support and manage arrangements for vulnerable staff.

## 5 STAFF

Continued staff commitment and flexibility is key to supporting COVID safe learning environments.

In line with the [CHO direction](#), only fully vaccinated staff will be permitted onsite in 2022.

We repeat our ongoing advice that if you develop cold or flu-like symptoms you must not attend work, and should seek testing as soon as possible, in accordance with Queensland Health advice. We remind you also that [additional leave provisions](#) are in place to support you in managing COVID related absences for yourself or family. Please be assured your school and Catholic Education Services will respond to your particular needs and concerns in a compassionate and supportive manner.

Staff who are vulnerable should discuss options with their principal to allow working from home, where possible.

### 5.1 COVID POSITIVE OR QUARANTINED STAFF

To assist the school in managing cases within the school community, all staff are required to notify the school if they test positive for COVID.

Staff who are positive with COVID or are required to quarantine due to being a close contact may return to school once they have satisfied public health quarantine or isolation requirements. There is no need to provide evidence of negative tests etc. Regardless of satisfying any quarantine or isolation requirements, staff should not return to work until they are well, as per guidance [here](#).

### 5.2 CRITICALLY ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Education settings have been identified as critical industry; therefore, they may nominate critically essential workers. A critically essential worker for education is restricted to teachers, who are unable to be replaced, and their physical presence on site is absolutely critical to ongoing school operations. These critically essential workers are able to leave quarantine if they are a close contact to attend work, with a number of considerations as found [here](#). This is not a carte blanche for teachers to avoid quarantine requirements as a close contact

This is a highly regulated allowance, and schools will need to compile a list of critically essential workers and submit this list to [criticalworkerlodgement@dsdilgp.qld.gov.au](mailto:criticalworkerlodgement@dsdilgp.qld.gov.au). More information may be found [here](#).

### 5.3 UNWELL WORKERS

Current Queensland Health advice requires workers not to come to work if they are unwell, and a responsibility is also put upon an employer to not allow unwell workers to attend work. This is further legislated in the WHS Act 2011 (Qld.).

If staff are presenting with flu-like symptoms, they are able to get priority access to RATs at a Qld testing clinic, under the [Qld Government Return to School Plan](#). If they develop flu like symptoms whilst at work, they may be able to access school supplied RATs, depending on availability.

**Please note: Staff who return a negative RAT result still must not attend school if they are unwell or are under a quarantine or isolation requirement.**

If a staff member has hay-fever, allergies or other conditions that are not contagious but may present as flu-like symptoms, they will need to obtain a medical certificate stating that they are able to continue work. Medical certificates for hay-fever etc. may be considered perpetual exemptions, however staff should monitor their condition and see their GP if their symptoms worsen or change.

## 6 FACE MASKS

The government has mandated that all adults and secondary students must wear face masks (masks) when attending school unless they have a [lawful exemption](#). Primary students (regardless of age) do not have to wear masks but can if they wish.

### 6.1 SECONDARY STUDENTS (REGARDLESS OF AGE)

All high school students, including those who are under 12 years of age, need to wear a mask unless they are seated indoors or outdoors or are able to maintain a 1.5 metre distance from others. Wearing of masks going from class to class will be critical and should be enforced as best as possible. All secondary students must carry a mask with them at all times.

### 6.2 TEACHERS AND SCHOOL OFFICERS

Generally, teachers (primary and high school) are required to wear masks while standing or moving about indoors but may remove their mask when seated or if able to maintain a 1.5 metre distance from others while teaching or interacting with students. So, if a teacher is standing at the front of the class and maintaining at least 1.5m distance from others, they do not need to wear a mask. A face shield could be used if visibility of the mouth is essential for teaching and physical distancing is not possible. Masks can be removed when outdoors if 1.5 metres distance can be maintained from others. Teachers and school officers should carry a mask with them at all times.

### 6.3 STAFF AND OTHER ADULTS

All other adults must wear masks unless seated **and** able to maintain physical distancing. Masks must be worn when outdoors, if physical distancing is not possible. All adults must carry a mask with them at all times.

## 7 BOARDING SCHOOL STUDENTS

Due to their discrete needs, boarding colleges will be subject to additional requires regarding screening and testing of students, as well as managing confirmed cases and close contacts. The three key documents for boarding colleges are:

- [COVID-19 Operating Guidelines](#) (this document): used to manage most regular COVID requirements within the school setting.
- [Boarding- Preparing and managing COVID-19](#): Document released by EQ in early Feb, to be used for determining and managing confirmed COVID cases, as well as close contacts.

- [Managing a quarantined boarding facility](#): Further details on managing students in isolation in quarantine, including laundry, food and PPE requirements.

## 8 SITE ACCESS

### 8.1 LIMITING SITE ACCESS

From the 7<sup>th</sup> February, schools must limit site access, with exceptions for parents and carers of students experiencing vulnerability or with higher needs, and for parents of students attending Prep, Year 1 or Year 7. Each school will have their own plan on managing this access.

Site access should also be limited for contractors and service providers, allowing access to essential and critical service providers only, particularly those who are providing wellbeing support to students, such as therapists, counsellors etc.

### 8.2 VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS FOR SITE ACCESS

On 11th December 2021, the Queensland Government issued a direction regarding the vaccination of persons entering high risk settings, which includes schools, out of school hours care, and early childhood and learning centres. From 17th December 2021, any service providers entering high risk settings will need to provide evidence of at least one approved COVID-19 vaccination, and will need to provide evidence of being fully vaccinated by 11:59pm 23rd January 2022. The vaccination requirements do not apply to visitors.

For example:

1. A plumber, IT technician, gardener, consultant or a volunteer will need to be vaccinated and show evidence of this vaccination upon entry to site.
2. A parent coming onsite for a meeting, attend and assembly or pick up their child is not required to be vaccinated.
3. A parent coming onsite to assist in the tuckshop will need to be vaccinated.

More information on site access including requirements for contractors and service providers may be found [here](#).

### 8.3 CHECK IN QLD

Although the Check In Qld app is now no longer required for contact tracing purposes, schools will still need to keep using the Check In Qld app to verify vaccination status for contractors, service providers and other workers entering the school site. For further information on the Check In Qld app and site access, please see the fact sheet [here](#).

### 8.4 PICK UP AND DROP OFF

At the discretion of principals, parents may be allowed onsite to collect their children at pick up and drop off times. Schools still have a responsibility here to ensure there is ample space for physical distancing. Other factors such as student protection, general site security and traffic considerations should also be assessed in determining whether parents will be allowed onsite. Where parents are entering any building during this time, they will need to comply with the site access measures as above, including Check In Qld and regular school sign in systems. Where accessing the school site, but not going into building (congregating in open areas etc.) then use of the Check In Qld is recommended, but ultimately at the discretion of the principal.

Where schools make the decision to allow parents onsite at these times, allocation of gathering areas and entry points, as well as physical distancing signage may assist in managing COVID requirements.

## 9 MEETINGS WITHIN THE SCHOOL

Face to face meetings, including staff meetings or parent /teacher meetings should be transitioned online. Where it is deemed absolutely necessary that meetings are held face to face, then strict physical distancing and mask wearing rules shall apply, and numbers should be kept to an absolute minimum. Venue density rules of 1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> shall also apply.

Meetings held after school, such as P&F meetings, should be subject to venue density rules.

Sign in should be managed in accordance with site access [here](#). Parents and carers coming in for meetings are deemed visitors and are not required to be vaccinated.

## 10 CONTRACTORS, SERVICE PROVIDERS AND EXTERNAL AGENCIES

Please see [site access](#), and further information [here](#).

## 11 SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES AND LARGER GATHERINGS

From the 7<sup>th</sup> February, school assemblies and large gatherings are suspended under the [Qld Government Return to School Plan](#). School assemblies should be conducted online during this period. This section will be updated when the situation changes.

## 12 PUBLIC EVENTS (INDOOR OR OUTDOOR)

From the 7<sup>th</sup> February, school event involving the public are suspended under the [Qld Government Return to School Plan](#). This section will be updated when the situation changes.

## 13 SERVING OF FOOD

There are now no COVID specific measures required.

## 14 EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

There are now no COVID specific measures required.

## 15 EXCURSIONS AND CAMPS

From the 7<sup>th</sup> February, school event involving the public are suspended under the [Qld Government Return to School Plan](#). This section will be updated when the situation changes.

**Please note: Sporting events that are held off site such as swimming are covered in the School Sports section below.**

## 16 SCHOOL SPORTS

School sports and physical education can resume normal operations. Although they may be deemed as large gatherings, school carnivals, inter school sporting events and representative sports may proceed, with COVID safe measures in place.

Some suggestions are made below for larger events which may need to proceed due to selection trials etc. Ultimately the schools will need to determine what is required to manage the risk effectively, as each event will be quite different. If in doubt, please discuss with David Kemp.

Consider:

- Only involving students competing for trial and selection events.
- Do not invite spectators or place a limit of one parent per student.
- As parents are not required to be vaccinated, consider having them seated in a separate section to students. Parents attending as volunteers will need to be vaccinated.
- Due to large numbers in smaller areas, some schools have moved cross country events forward, and postponed swimming carnivals to next term. This will need to be closely managed, due to the higher risk of heat stress and exhaustion for cross country in the warmer months.

## 17 HEALTH SUPPORT PROCEDURES

All Cairns Catholic Education schools must continue to implement student health plans.

Advice from the Chief Health Officer indicates staff should undertake a visual assessment of the student to ensure there are no visible signs of being unwell prior to any procedure being undertaken:

- if the student appears unwell, do not continue with the procedure, follow existing guidance for unwell students/COVID-19 suspected cases, and advise parents as soon as possible
- where a student appears well, carry out the procedure with the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as per the table below.

Where a student has excess saliva, a risk assessment should occur in each case (as it should each time there is a procedure) to ensure that the risk of body fluid exposure is minimised and correct PPE is used (for example the addition of a gown if it is required).

It is always important to ensure that [hand hygiene](#) is carried out.

Queensland Health advice has been used to inform the PPE as outlined in the table below.

Specialised health procedure	PPE
Blood glucose measurement	Gloves
Insulin pen injection or needle and syringe	Gloves
Enteral feeding	Gloves
Nasogastric feeding	Gloves

Colostomy/ileostomy care	Gloves. Plastic apron if risk of splashes (staff may choose)
Clean intermittent catheterisation	Gloves. Plastic apron if risk of splashes (staff may choose)
Continuous oxygen administration	Gloves
Administration of buccal midazolam	Gloves
Cleaning of soiling	Gloves and plastic aprons
Use of asthma reliever medication with spacer	Nil unless coughing then gloves, mask goggles/face shield*
Oral and nasal suctioning	Gloves Long sleeved fluid resistant gown mask Goggles/face shield
Tracheostomy care	Gloves Long sleeved fluid resistant gown mask Goggles/face shield

## 18 INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC PROGRAM, ENSEMBLES, CHOIRS AND OTHER PERFORMANCES

Choirs and other activities involving singing may be undertaken without masks, however physical distancing should be observed where practicable. Similarly, performing arts involving physical exertion may be undertaken without masks, however physical distancing should be observed where practicable.

Instrumental music programs may proceed as per normal, with reference to masks requirements [here](#).

Normal cleaning procedures for shared wind instruments should be strictly observed.

## 19 CLEANING

Disinfectants used for COVID cleans will need to be either a bleach solution or a disinfectant [approved for COVID use](#) by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. The preference is still for a quaternary ammonium compound based disinfectant such as [Sigura hospital grade disinfectant](#), due to its longer surface protection, and non-hazardous nature.

Schools are able to return to their normal pre-COVID cleaning regimes, with a mid-week COVID clean of high touch surfaces (desks, doorhandles, handrails etc.) to be undertaken, if using a quaternary ammonium compound based disinfectant. A mid-week clean with these products will allow an adequate amount of protection, with the 48-hour weekend period effectively eliminating any potential COVID surface contamination.

If using other [approved disinfectants](#), then disinfecting of high touch surfaces should occur daily.

## 19.1 PLAYGROUND CLEANING

There are now no COVID specific measures required.

## 20 USE OF SHARED EQUIPMENT OR LOANED RESOURCES

There are now no COVID specific measures required.

## 21 LIBRARY BOOKS AND SCHOOL READERS

There are now no COVID specific measures required.

Whilst Public Health in Australia has not released any official stance on library books and other library resources, the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control has stated the following.

*"There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus is transmitted via textbooks, paper or other paper-based products. Laminated or glossy paper-based products (e.g., magazines and children's books) and items with plastic covers (e.g., DVDs) can be contaminated if handled by a person with COVID-19; however, the risk of transmission between users of borrowed items is very low."*

Given this, cleaning for student books, readers, magazines and other glossy or plastic media may revert to pre-COVID cleaning protocols. Whilst ALIA still has a 24-hour resting period for books, this is a national guideline that includes adults, and does not reflect the local context of Far North Queensland or lower risk factors of children.

## 22 CHURCH AND PARISH BUILDINGS

In consultation with the parish, schools may use parish buildings and operate under normal school rules. Where use of the parish building includes the public (including parents and carers), then use should be dictated by whatever rules the parish has in place.

## 23 SCHOOL TRANSPORT

There are now no COVID specific measures required.

## 24 USE OF FACILITIES AND SCHOOL AMENITIES

Principals may negotiate the use of their facilities for external users. There are currently no requirements for the external party to provide a COVID plan as has been required previously.

External parties are exempt from school vaccination requirements, providing that the use of the school facilities occurs outside of designated school hours.