

# SCHOOLS AND KURA

A guide to contact tracing



## Information for schools and kura on contact tracing

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## 1.0 A guide to contact tracing in Auckland schools and kura

This guide is for Auckland schools and kura, and outlines the process for contact tracing in the region. It reflects the levels of community transmission, the Omicron response, the COVID-19 protection framework and vaccination levels.

The Ministry of Health has produced [national guidelines on managing COVID-19 exposure events at schools and kura](#). This includes information on protecting schools and kura using preventative measures and template letters to be used when communicating with contacts of cases and the wider school community.

**For contact tracing advice for Auckland schools and kura (primary, intermediate, secondary), please refer to this Auckland Guide, as the process differs to the national approach<sup>1</sup>.**

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<sup>1</sup> In Auckland, Ministry of Education Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) will be schools' primary liaison points. In other areas of New Zealand, schools will liaise directly with their Public Health Unit.

## Guide to contact tracing for Auckland schools and kura

Where hand hygiene, mask use, physical distancing, student and staff vaccination, and good classroom ventilation has been in place, the risk of COVID-19 transmission in school and kura is considered **low**. This means **it is no longer necessary for a school or kura to immediately close when a case has been identified who has attended while infectious**. There is no requirement to do a 'deep clean'. Your school or kura will receive guidance and the resources needed to manage the response.



## 2.0 If you hear that someone at school or kura has COVID-19

You may hear of someone with COVID-19 in your school or kura community in three ways:

1. The Ministry of Education Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) will contact you as the principal or nominated person to inform you of the case and discuss next actions. Find the SPOC details below.
2. The staff member, student or family of the person with COVID-19 may contact you first. This may be before Public Health has spoken to them, or before the Ministry of Education has been notified.
3. A GP or other health professional may call you, as they have been notified of a person with COVID-19.

Regardless of how you hear, we appreciate this will be immensely worrying for you and your school community.

However, you do not need to automatically close your school or kura. You will have smaller numbers of close contacts than in previous COVID-19 outbreaks and these can be managed while your school remains open. High rates of vaccination in Auckland and safe practices in schools and kura mean that you can inform your school community that there is a low risk of infection for most staff and students, except for those who have been near the case.

**If you become aware of a case associated with your service, please contact the Ministry of Education Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) for advice:**

- Email: [covidresponseauckland@education.govt.nz](mailto:covidresponseauckland@education.govt.nz)
- Phone: 0800 268 440

**The Ministry of Education SPOC roles are currently being carried out by the Auckland Directors of Education.**

They will work with Public Health to confirm the case has COVID-19, whether they were infectious at school or kura and when. This determines what actions you will need to take.

If you do need to identify close contacts because the case was infectious at school, the Ministry of Education SPOCs will support you through this, and help you communicate with your community.

They will also seek public health input in specific circumstances, for example:

- There has been further transmission within the school or kura;
- There have been significant staff exposures that put a school's ability to operate at risk;
- In special needs schools as these need extra risk assessment;
- There are individuals at high risk of severe disease and/or where the risk mitigation strategies may be challenging to apply (e.g., children with disabilities or complex behavioural needs); and/or
- In schools with hostel settings.

### 3.0 Contact tracing at your school or kura

This document is designed to guide you on the steps to take if someone attends your school **while infectious** with COVID-19. It is very important that you read this document carefully and carry out all required actions.

Where hand hygiene, mask use, physical distancing, student and staff vaccination, and good classroom ventilation has been in place, the risk of COVID-19 transmission in school settings is considered **low**. **This means it is no longer necessary for a school or kura to immediately close when a case has been identified who has attended while infectious.**

If someone with COVID-19 attends your school while infectious, then you are highly likely to have Contacts (Close and Casual) at your school or kura. This could include students, staff, contractors, and visitors.

Your school or kura will receive guidance needed to manage the response. You will only need to identify contacts where you can know who was there - e.g. classrooms, staff rooms. You will not, for example, be expected to know about students who have congregated in areas like playgrounds and toilets.

Contact tracing in this lower risk environment will be pragmatic. The highest risk is where contacts are close together in an indoor space like a classroom or staffroom. If you can identify contacts from informal gatherings around the school or kura, like interactions at lunchtimes, please add these contacts.

## Actions to take when there is a case at your school or kura

1. Public Health will complete an initial case investigation and find out the person's infectious period and any details relevant to your school or kura.
2. Public Health will inform your MoE SPOC, and provide the case's:
  - **Name** (this is for contact tracing purposes only and should not be shared)
  - **Infectious period** (or confirm if they did not attend school while infectious; in this scenario, the rest of the guidance in this pack **does not** apply)
  - **Self-isolation end-date and testing advice for contacts** (this may be updated if there are subsequent cases).

Sometimes, your school may be contacted by the case or their parent/caregiver *before* you hear from Public Health or your MoE SPOC. When this happens:

- **Let your MoE SPOC know.** They will confirm the details with Public Health and be your ongoing liaison/conduit with Public Health if/when the case is confirmed.
3. Your MoE SPOC will work with you to identify if there are any Close Contacts at your school or kura. MoE SPOCs have undergone training to support this.
  4. If the student has been on a school bus or at after-school care on school grounds, please collect student lists from these providers for the dates and times the case was using these services. The MoE SPOCS will liaise with other schools if their students have been exposed (e.g. students of more than one school share a bus).
  5. Use this [Excel spreadsheet](#) to collate the names of the Close Contacts you have identified in Step 3 above.  
Use this list for Step 6 below, **and** send a copy to the National Investigation and Tracing Centre (NITC) – email below. Please inform your MoE SPOC when this has been done.

## Actions

1	Password protect the spreadsheet [use review tab > protect workbook > enter password]	<b>Within working hours</b> <b>8</b>
2	<p>Draft and send email to <a href="mailto:covid-19_contacttracing@health.govt.nz">covid-19_contacttracing@health.govt.nz</a> using the following text:</p> <p>Kia ora</p> <p>Following the case being identified at [school / kura name], attached is a list of individuals who have been identified as Close Contacts for upload into the NCTS.</p> <p>Noho ora mai [Principal/Tumuaki]</p>	
3	<p>Draft and send follow-up email to <a href="mailto:covid-19_contacttracing@health.govt.nz">covid-19_contacttracing@health.govt.nz</a> using the following text:</p> <p>Kia ora</p> <p>The password for the contact list just sent through for [school / kura name] is [include password].</p> <p>Noho ora mai, [Principal/Tumuaki]</p>	
4	The NITC team will respond to your emails to inform you that your spreadsheet has been received.	

6. **The template letters for Close Contacts** are in the [national guidelines](#).
7. You will be supplied with the details you need to finalise these (e.g. self-isolation and testing dates). Then please send the relevant letter to those identified in your Close Contact list (Step 5 above).
8. Everyone else at the school or kura when the case attended while infectious is considered a Casual Contact. They need only watch for symptoms, and if unwell, get tested and stay home.  
  
The Ministry of Health's national guidelines (see links above) also have template letters for you to send to your wider school community, including Casual Contacts.

9. Proximity to the case, the length of time, the nature of the interaction and the physical environment (indoor space) will decide if a person is a close contact.
10. Once the Close Contact details are loaded into the National Investigation and Tracing Centre (NITC) contact system, individuals will be contacted with advice on testing and self-isolation.
11. Please be aware of those most at risk from COVID-19:  
Some people, such as those with metabolic diseases (e.g. obesity, type 2 diabetes), pregnant women or those with weakened immune systems, may be at higher risk of serious illness from COVID. If members of your school or kura community are at higher risk and have concerns, they should seek the advice of their general practitioner or call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 for advice. Healthline is a free, 24/7 service with interpreters available.

## Appendix 1: Q&As on contact tracing in Auckland schools and kura

### What will happen if there is a confirmed case in a student or staff member at your school?

If a student or staff member at your school or kura tests positive for COVID-19, Public Health will notify your Ministry of Education (MoE) SPOC.

Public Health will carry out the initial case investigation and determine key details your school or kura and MoE SPOCs will need to know. This includes whether the person was infectious while at school.

The MoE SPOC will be your primary liaison point and will work with Public Health on your behalf.

### What should you do if a staff member or parent/caregiver tells you that they or their child has COVID19?

Contact your MoE SPOC, who will liaise with Public Health to confirm that the person has indeed tested positive for COVID-19, and was infectious while at school.

If confirmed, your MoE SPOC will be your conduit with Public Health; they will provide you with the advice and materials you need to help you assess your school's level of risk, identify contacts and communicate with your school or kura community. For example, you will be supplied template letters/emails and public health messaging.

It is *no longer necessary* to immediately close when a case is identified as infectious while at school or kura.

### How long is a case infectious for?

A person with COVID-19 is considered infectious from 48 hours before their symptoms started (or the date of their test if they had no symptoms). They will isolate for at least 14 days from their symptom onset/positive test result. They will then be cleared to leave self-isolation by Public Health, following a final check of their symptoms.

### How will you know which other students or staff may be at risk from the person with COVID-19?

Public Health will carry out an initial investigation to establish the case's infectious period and any details relevant to your school environment. Your MoE SPOC will then inform your school or kura and advise you what to do next.

### What information do you need to share with your school community (other staff/parents/caregivers)?

Your MoE SPOC will work with you to identify any Close Contacts of the case at your school or kura. They will also escalate any issues as required with the Public Health team.

Where there has been mask use, good ventilation and physical distancing – in combination with high levels of vaccination (including booster shots where eligible) – it is expected there will be only small number of Close Contacts.

Your MoE SPOC will also provide you with the materials and templates (such as in this pack) you will need to respond to an exposure event in your school or kura. You will need to send out information to those people identified as Close Contacts. There will also be public health messaging for the wider school community on any actions required (e.g. watching for COVID-19 symptoms).

### **If all or some of our students are already fully vaccinated against COVID, do they still need to follow the public health advice provided?**

Yes. The vaccine is a good protective measure, but no vaccine is 100% effective. You may still get ill or pass the virus to others even if you don't have symptoms. It's important to follow the public health advice given.

### **Will you have to close your school or kura if there is a case there?**

No. If your school has a high level of vaccination and other mitigation measures are in place, it is no longer necessary to immediately close your school or kura if a case is identified there. Your MoE SPOC, in liaison with Public Health, will tell you if closure is necessary.

### **Will you have to do a 'deep clean' of your school or kura if there is a case there?**

There is no requirement to do a 'deep clean'. You can find advice and guidelines for cleaning during the COVID-19 pandemic [here](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-general-cleaning-and-disinfection-advice): <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-general-cleaning-and-disinfection-advice>.

### **What if more cases are identified at the school?**

Public Health will complete additional risk assessments and work with your MoE SPOC to advise you on any further action needed.

### **How will we know if close contacts have been cleared to return to school?**

Close contacts need to isolate at home for 10 days after they were last exposed to the person with COVID-19. They also need to get tested immediately, then 5 and 8 days after they were exposed.

If anyone in the house has symptoms they should get another test immediately, and stay home until this comes back negative and they have been symptom free for at least 24 hours.

Close contacts will be released by the National Investigation and Testing Centre and provided with a release letter if all tests have returned negative results and they remain well.

### **Can we ask for staff or students who have recovered from COVID to provide a negative test result before they return?**

There is no value in testing people who have recovered from COVID-19 as they can continue to test positive for several weeks – despite no longer being infectious. This is because pieces of dead virus stay in the body long after someone has recovered from COVID.

As long as they have completed their isolation period and been cleared by public health, they are considered recovered and cannot spread the virus to people where they live or work.

International scientific studies have also found the virus cannot infect others after about a week in the body.

### **There has been a case at a neighbouring school attended by some of our students' siblings. Do we have to do anything?**

No, not unless you are contacted by your MoE SPOC/Public Health. If a student or staff member at your school becomes a Close Contact because they live with a COVID-19 case, they will be required to self-isolate, and will be communicated with directly.

### **Our school has a case whose siblings attend a neighbouring school. Do we or they need to do anything?**

As noted above, your MoE SPOC will work with Public Health and your school to identify any Close Contacts. You only need to consider the contacts at your school. This is for privacy reasons, as well as logistical ones.

### **We have a staff member or student who has told us they are a close or household contact. Do we need to do anything?**

No. But the staff member or student will need to follow the Public Health advice they receive and not return to school until they have completed their self-isolation period (and all testing), and been cleared to leave self-isolation by Public Health.

### **What should you do if an unwell student (or staff member) comes to school?**

Anyone who is unwell with COVID-like symptoms should not be at school. Students or staff who arrive at school with one or more of these symptoms (see below) should be sent home. Staff and caregivers should be advised to call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 (a 24/7 service with interpreters available).

While a child is awaiting collection by their parent or caregiver, they should be moved, if possible, to a room where they can be isolated behind a closed door. Provide them with a mask (if they are not already wearing one) and, ideally, open a window for ventilation. If it is not possible to isolate them, move them to a well ventilated area that is at least 2 metres away from other people.

If they need to go to the bathroom while waiting to be collected, they should use a separate bathroom if possible. The bathroom should be cleaned and disinfected using standard cleaning products before being used by anyone else.

COVID-19 symptoms can include one or more of the following:

 <b>Fever of 38°C or higher</b>	 <b>New or worsening cough</b>	 <b>Shortness of breath and difficulty breathing</b>
 <b>Sore throat</b>	 <b>Runny nose</b>	 <b>Loss of sense of smell or taste</b>
 <b>Diarrhoea or vomiting</b>	 <b>Headaches</b>	 <b>Muscle aches or pains</b>

### **Who can you contact about the public health actions you need to take at your school?**

Contact your MoE SPOC in the first instance and they can liaise with Public Health on your behalf.

### **Will on-site testing be needed if you have a case at your school?**

No, not unless you have a significant number of students who are identified as Close Contacts. Your MoE SPOC will liaise with Public Health and the Northern Region Health Co-ordination Centre (NRHCC) Testing Team about whether on-site testing is deemed necessary.

### **How long will test results take to come back? Can staff or students attend school or kura while waiting for their result?**

If the result is positive, they should hear back in around 48 hours. Negative tests can take a bit longer to return. Please contact your doctor or testing centre if you do not have your result within five days.

Contacts awaiting test results cannot attend school.

Close Contacts must self-isolate for 10 days, have an Immediate, Day 5 and Day 8 test (and return negative results), *and* be cleared by Public Health before they can return.

### **Do we need to take special steps for staff or students at our school or kura who may be at greater risk due to other health conditions?**

Some people, such as pregnant women or those who are immune-compromised, may be at higher risk of illness from COVID. These people should seek the advice of their health professional or call Healthline on 0800 358 5453.

### **Do students need a negative test if they are sent home unwell or have been away unwell?**

No. But if you're aware they are experiencing COVID-like symptoms, it should be recommended that they get a test. And they shouldn't return to school until they have been symptom-free for at least 24 hours.

### **In Year 7-13 schools, with up to 300 students not required to wear masks, how would that be safe?**

Students in Years 4-13 will be required to wear masks in most cases. Masks, or other face coverings, are a protective measure against the spread of COVID-19, but are only one of the mitigations. Other measures such as vaccination, ventilation, hand and respiratory hygiene, limiting student numbers and keeping school groups separated are also important. Having all of these measures offers the best levels of protection.

### **Can relievers/part timers go across bubbles?**

Ideally, staff would not work across more than one bubble as this would significantly increase the number of contacts the person would have if they were diagnosed with COVID-19. At the very least, people should avoid working across more than one bubble in a single day.

### **How do classes separate in MLEs?**

Schools with MLEs will need to take a pragmatic approach to managing classes in these environments - for example, by having staggered or part-time attendance. There is potentially an increased risk where bubbles are sharing air inside. This can be mitigated by spacing bubbles, having good ventilation and wearing masks. Ideally, break times would be spent outside. If a staff or child in one of these spaces tests positive for COVID19, there are likely to be more contacts identified than in a single-cell classroom.

### **In a Y7-13 school, staff bubbles can't really be created as they teach a range of classes?**

The movement of teaching staff across classes will mean that if a teacher tests positive for COVID-19, the students in all of the classes they have taught will become contacts. However, schools can only take a pragmatic approach, and ensure that all other mitigation measures – mask wearing, hand hygiene, vaccination (where possible) are in place to reduce the risk of transmission.

### **Limit staff and student movement: how might we do this in secondary school? Is that the expectation?**

The movement of teaching staff across classes will mean that if a teacher tests positive for COVID-19, the students in all of the classes they have taught will become contacts. However, schools can only take a pragmatic approach, and ensure that all other mitigation measures – mask wearing, hand hygiene, vaccination (where possible) are in place to reduce the risk of transmission.

### **What about drop-off and pick-up with parents on site? It's impossible to know who was here, and it's not always parents who do the drop-offs and pick-ups.**

There will be no expectation from Public Health that schools will be able to track the movement of parents coming to and from school for pick-ups and drop-offs. Given the higher rates of vaccination in the community now, and the expectation that parents/caregivers wear masks, there is also less risk from these types of interactions than there was at the start of the outbreak. Schools may also wish to consider staggered or limited drop-offs and pick-ups, and asking parents not to enter school grounds.

### **There is varying advice around masks. Is a mask of any description and specification better than no mask at all?**

COVID-19 is highly transmissible so wearing a face covering over the nose and mouth is an important form of protection. In general, a face covering such as a disposable or washable mask should be worn whenever people leave their homes.

Face coverings can protect against the spread of infectious droplets and particles when an infected person speaks, laughs, coughs, sneezes or breathes.

Guidance on using a suitable reusable or disposable mask or face covering is available [here](#) on the Ministry of Health website and [here](#) on the Unite Against COVID website.

### **What if a child is away sick and the parent refuses to get them tested for COVID-19 before they return?**

The child should not return to school until they have been symptom-free for at least 24 hours.

### **How do we monitor interaction in bathrooms during breaks?**

There will be no expectation from Public Health that schools and kura will be able to track the movements and interactions of students in settings like toilets. Schools will be asked for information for contact tracing that can be known, such as the classrooms staff and students were in, with whom and when. However, you may wish to think about how your school manages this setting – and communicate this to

your staff and students. For example, making sure masks are worn, not congregating in bathrooms/toilets, and limiting the number of people in a bathroom/toilet at any one time.

**If we limit one bubble at a time on our outdoor playgrounds, would this be acceptable?**

Outdoor interactions are of less risk due to the continuous air flow and, with playgrounds, children being 'on the move', which also limits their exposure. Mask use also reduces the risk. Limiting playground use to one bubble at a time is likely to further reduce exposure, but may not be practical for some schools.

**With up to 85% of our students on school buses, and these buses shared with other schools, there is difficulty in tracing these students. School bus lists are not particularly accurate, and lots of students are on public buses. Advice?**

It is not expected that schools and kura will be able to provide full and comprehensive bus lists. Any lists your school has may be useful, but there are other means available for contact tracing on buses, such as AT Hop cards and liaison between Public Health and the transport provider.

### **In school playgrounds, outside, large numbers of students mix. Is this high or low risk, i.e. should we segregate outside break times?**

Outdoor interactions are of less risk due to the continuous air flow and, with playgrounds, children being 'on the move', which also limits their exposure. Mask use also reduces the risk. Staggering break times and limiting playground use to one bubble at a time is likely to further reduce exposure, but may not be practical for some schools. For secondary school students, the priority mitigations will be mask wearing and physical distancing, alongside vaccination.

### **If we organise single cell bubbles for during the school day, are we allowed to open up before and after school care on the site which would mix the bubbles?**

If you have mixed and single-cell bubbles, you just need to be aware that if a child tests positive for COVID19 after being part of both, everyone in the single and mixed bubbles will become a contact.

### **It sounds like ILEs are more at risk than single cell - is this a concern for ILE schools?**

There is potentially an increased risk where bubbles are sharing air inside. This can be mitigated by spacing bubbles, good ventilation and mask use. Ideally, break times would be spent outside. If a staff or child in one of these spaces tests positive for COVID-19, there are likely to be more contacts identified than in a single-cell classroom.

### **What about play-based classes for the juniors? Are they considered the same as an ILE? Do they need to stay inside at lunchtime then or can they move around the school at break times?**

See above.

### **Can students get Long COVID?**

There is still no standard definition of long COVID, and the syndrome itself is quite variable. Children can experience it, but it appears to be less common than in adults and they tend to recover quicker. Read more [here](#).

In addition, children are less likely to catch COVID-19 due to having fewer 'receptors', and are also less likely to transmit it. Figures on the incidence of COVID-19 in New Zealand children are available [here](#).

### **Where can you find more information and resources?**

For more information, please visit:

- [www.health.govt.nz/covid-19](http://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19)
- [www.covid19.govt.nz](http://www.covid19.govt.nz)
- <https://www.arphs.health.nz/>
- [www.immune.org.nz](http://www.immune.org.nz)
- Healthline on 0800 358 5453. Healthline is a free, 24/7 service with interpreters available.

## Appendix 2: Preparing for a COVID case at your school or kura

Information to prepare	Answers
Total number of staff and students at your school or kura?	
Do you have your school bubbles clearly defined with lists of who is in each one? (If different to classrooms).	
Have you identified a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for your school or kura, who will be your key liaison with the MoE SPOC? (This is usually the principal or a member of the senior leadership team).	
Do you have students from other/neighbouring schools or kura attending your school for any classes?	
Do you have up to date contact details for visitors to your properties, such as support staff, contractors, school lunch providers etc?	
How are you currently recording visits to your school or kura? Do you have QR codes in place?	
Do you have a plan in place for if a staff member or student becomes unwell with COVID-like symptoms while at school or kura?	
Do you have a plan in place for if media contact your school or kura about a suspected COVID-19 case?	
Do you have template emails and/or other communications prepared and ready to send to your school community in the event of a case at your school? NB: Your MoE SPOC will be able to assist with this.	
Do you have Infection Prevention and Control measures in place? Cleaning products and processes, and Personal Protective Equipment such as masks, gloves and hand sanitiser?	
What ventilation and physical distancing measures are in place at your school or kura?	