

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Infectious Disease Policy

Ratified

22/03/22

Policy

This policy outlines the strategies and actions that schools are required to take to prevent the transmission of an infectious disease or control transmission of an infectious disease when a case/s is identified.

Summary

- Primary responsibility for the prevention and control of infectious diseases lies with individuals, families and public health authorities.
- Schools are not expected to provide expert advice or treat students, which is the role of medical practitioners and health authorities.
- As of December 2019 [changes to the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations](#) (the Regulations) mean primary schools and children's services are no longer required to notify the Department of Health and Human Services if a child at their school has a confirmed infectious disease.
- A person in charge of a primary school must not allow a child to attend the school in accordance with the Regulations if they have been informed the child is infected with, or been in contact with a person with an infectious disease/condition listed in the Regulations; where that condition requires exclusion. Diseases and exclusion periods are listed in the [DHHS school exclusion table](#).
- As of December 2019, changes to the Regulations mean failure of a person in charge of a primary school to exclude a child with, or exposed to, a specified infectious disease from a primary school, in accordance with the Regulations, may result in an infringement penalty. An existing court penalty also remains.
- Schools have a legal responsibility to help manage infectious diseases in their facilities and have an important role to play in supporting prevention and control of disease transmission.

Details

Schools have a legal responsibility to help manage infectious diseases in their facilities.

Schools also have an important role to play in supporting the prevention and control of transmission of infectious diseases through:

- abiding by legislated requirements for school exclusion and immunisation status recording
- supporting the personal hygiene routines of students, for example, provision of hand hygiene facilities
- ensuring procedures are in place to safely manage the handling of spills of blood and other body fluids or substances.

Prevention of infectious diseases

The following table outlines the strategies and actions that schools are required to take to prevent the transmission of an infectious disease.

Support for immunisation programs

Schools have a role in helping health authorities and families prevent and control infectious diseases through the support of immunisation programs and through recording the immunisation status of each student. For more information, see the Department's [Immunisation Policy](#).

Standard precautions

Staff and students must treat all blood and other body fluids or substances as being potentially infectious and practice standard precautions whenever dealing with them.

Standard precautions include:

- hand hygiene, for more information, see the [Personal Hygiene Policy](#)
- the use of personal protective equipment (for example, gloves and masks)
- safe handling and disposal of 'sharps', for more information, see the [Syringe Disposals and Injuries Policy](#)
- respiratory hygiene (i.e. 'cover your cough' and disposing of tissues in a bin)

School education on hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is considered one of the most important infection control measures for reducing the spread of infection. Where appropriate, the Department recommends schools incorporate the teaching of hand hygiene routines into the curriculum and daily school activities; see the [Clean hands curriculum resource](#).

Hand hygiene should also be promoted through the display of available resources and DHHS posters.

Provision of soap

Schools have a responsibility to provide soap and other hand hygiene products to support good hand hygiene.

Management of blood and other body fluid or substance exposures

Schools should have appropriate personal protective equipment (for example, gloves and masks) available for staff to use when dealing with blood or body fluids/substances. Staff members and students should be familiar with and practice recommended standard precaution practices. For more information, see the Department's policy on [Blood Spills and Open Wounds Management](#).

Occupational health and safety

Appropriate personal protective equipment, such as single-use disposable gloves, must be provided for staff to use when dealing with blood or other body fluids or substances.

Schools should encourage staff to be appropriately vaccinated against preventable infectious diseases as per the [Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) recommendations for people working with children.

Control of transmission of infectious disease

The following table outlines the strategies and actions that schools are required to take to control transmission of infection when a case/s is identified.

Send unwell children home as soon as possible

Ensure that unwell children do not attend your school. Isolate children who become unwell during the day and send the unwell child home as soon as possible.

Notification of an infectious disease to DET via an IRIS alert

When a school is made aware of student illness that is a medically confirmed case(s) of pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, meningococcal disease polio, or novel coronavirus, this should be reported via the DET IRIS alert system. This is to assist DET (with DHHS) to monitor disease outbreak at a school level and to provide further guidance where required.

Seeking expert advice

If schools have questions or concerns about a child with an infectious disease, they can contact:

Department of Health and Human Services Communicable Disease Prevention and Control
telephone: [1300 651 160](tel:1300651160) (24 hours) infectious.diseases@dhhs.vic.gov.au (regularly monitored).

Exclusion of a child with an infectious disease — Primary school students

Children with certain infectious diseases, and children who have been in contact with certain infectious diseases, are required to be excluded from school for a specified period.

The DHHS School exclusion table identifies which infectious diseases require exclusion and for what period

As set out in the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2019, Principals of primary school-aged students must not allow a child to attend school if:

- they have been informed that the child is infected with an infectious disease, confirmed by a medical practitioner, that requires exclusion as described in the DHHS School exclusion table
- they have been informed that a child has been in contact with a person with an infectious disease as described in the School exclusion table
- during an outbreak, the Chief Health Officer directs a primary school to exclude a child based on material risk of a child contracting a vaccine-preventable disease (i.e. a child who is not immunised to be excluded until advised attendance can be resumed)

Exclusion of a child with an infectious disease — Secondary school students

Secondary schools are not bound by the legislative exclusion requirements which apply to primary schools, but are encouraged to follow the same guidance to ensure the safety of their students.

In the event of a public health risk, such as an infectious disease outbreak, secondary schools may be required under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 to comply with the directions of the Chief Health Officer or an authorised officer.

General responses to influenza, gastroenteritis and other common infections in your school

Schools should consider the following when responding to students affected by common infections:

- students with cold or flu-like symptoms or vomiting or diarrhoea should be encouraged to seek medical attention, limit contact with others and stay at home until symptoms have passed
- if a child becomes ill at school with these symptoms, schools should contact the family and arrange for the collection of the child
- good general hygiene remains the best defence against infection and schools should encourage children to regularly wash their hands and cover their nose and mouth if sneezing and coughing; see the Personal Hygiene Policy

Influenza pandemic response

An outline of key school actions against different stages of an influenza pandemic can be found in the [Human Influenza Pandemic Incident Response Procedures](#) (Pandemic Influenza Incident Response Plan). Schools should also refer to [DHHS advice regarding Pandemic influenza](#).

School community communication and additional advice

It is not generally necessary to communicate with the broader school community about an infectious disease, unless there is an outbreak or the school has been directed to pursue specific action by health authorities. Doing so can cause unnecessary anxiety in the school community.

For advice on alerting parents, or displaying signage, in relation to case(s) of a notifiable infectious disease in the school; schools can phone DHHS on [1300 651 160](#) who may give advice on whether such an action is required.

In more general cases, where communication has been deemed necessary, the school should give consideration as to what should be communicated to the school community.

It should:

- maintain student confidentiality
- be fact based
- be written in a way not to cause alarm
- inform parents and guardians that a school community member/s has been diagnosed with an infectious disease
- name the condition
- suggest that they seek medical advice regarding their child's health if they have concerns

Definitions

Hand hygiene

Hand hygiene is a general term referring to any action of hand cleansing. It includes hand washing with soap and water and using antimicrobial hand rubs (for example, an alcohol-based hand rub). For more detailed information about hand hygiene, see: Personal Hygiene in Related policies

Infectious diseases

Infectious diseases are diseases caused by pathogenic microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi; the diseases can be spread, directly or indirectly, from one person to another.

Respiratory hygiene or cough etiquette

These are terms used to describe infection prevention measures. Practices include:

- covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing

- using tissues and disposing of them appropriately
- attending to hand hygiene immediately after coughing, sneezing or blowing nose

Standard precautions

Standard precautions are the minimum infection prevention and control practices that must be used at all times for all people in all situations. The use of standard precautions aims to minimise and, where possible, eliminate the risk of transmission of infection.