



CHELtenham EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL

16/03/2020

Dear Parents

I write to keep you informed of the potential impact that Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) may have on our school in the coming weeks and months and to assure you that we are working tirelessly to ensure we are prepared for what might come next. We are a great community. We are a strong community - and together we will overcome any challenges that lie ahead of us.

As you may be aware, recently, the World Health Organisation declared the novel coronavirus a pandemic reflecting widespread increasing transmission of the virus globally.

The following is the latest information sent through to schools from the Department of Education around measures to combat the corona virus. We wish to assure all members of our community that we continue to follow the advice of the Department of Education and Training (DET) - who continues to work closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) - to plan for and respond to any impact COVID-19 may have on our school.

You may be aware of some schools closing for a week in response to confirmed COVID-19 cases. These actions are taken on the recommendation of DHHS to allow time for contact tracing and with the health and safety of all students and staff in the school community front of mind.

If we are told to close our school for a period of time, DHHS will work with us and the DET, and our staff and students will be advised to stay home and self-isolate for a given amount of time. This closure will support our school leaders and health officials to work through a contact and containment strategy, including decisions about extending the closure period.

If a school closure is imminent, there will be an immediate response from us that helps inform our community on next steps in a variety of ways - Dojo, Flexibuzz, Newsletters - and ensure that all necessary and relevant information is circulated broadly, and in a timely manner.

If the closure of our school occurs, it will be essential that learning continuity is maintained for our students. Our staff are working tirelessly through a range of options to support learning continuity for our students by providing suitable learning opportunities that can be completed away from the school setting. These include but are not limited to:

- Athletics which our school subscribes to,
- A soon to be released DET online website, *Learning from Home*, that will be available in the event of a government school closure.
- Pre-prepared worksheets or workbooks that can be provided to students in hardcopy.
- For the latest advice and information, including FAQs, please follow the links included here:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorian-public-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

As further COVID-19 updates and details become available to us, we will be certain to circulate these and keep everyone connected with our school informed.

CAMPS AND EXCURSIONS

All camps scheduled to commence from and including Tuesday 17 March must be postponed and rescheduled, or, if there is no other option, cancelled.

All excursions outside the school for purposes such as visits to cultural institutions, art galleries, theatres and sporting events or facilities planned from and including Tuesday 17 March must also be postponed or cancelled.

INTERNATIONAL ARRIVALS

Everyone arriving into Australia from overseas from midnight 15 March is required to self-isolate for 14 days. This obviously includes students and staff who may be returning from overseas excursions or other travel.

Importantly, it also includes parents and carers and any other relatives or friends of our students who are returning from overseas travel. **As they are required to self-isolate, they must not visit the school to pick up children or for any other reason.**

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

SCHOOL CLOSURES

No government school is currently closed or in the process of being closed. You will be informed directly if there is any prospect that our school will be closed, either as a stand-alone school closure or as part of a local or area-based closure. You will then be provided with communication through that process.

ORGANISED GATHERINGS

The Commonwealth Government has announced that mass gatherings of more than 500 people are now prohibited. This explicitly does not include schools running normal teaching and learning program. It does, however, apply to any school event that involves attendance by community members who are not students or staff and where total attendance will exceed 500. This includes school assemblies and sporting events. It does not include parent-teacher events unless more than 500 people including community members are expected to be present at any one time.

GOOD HYGIENE PRACTICES

Again, all the above steps are part of our efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19. We will endeavour to keep sending the message of good hygiene practices to all of our students and parents in the community. This includes thoroughly washing hands with soap and drying them properly.

A poster communicating good hygiene practices is available on the Department of Health and Human Services' coronavirus website.

Regards

Wayne Bach

Principal

Cheltenham East PS



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STATEMENT ON SCHOOL CLOSURES IN VICTORIA

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Victorian Chief Health Officer

Victorian Chief Human Biosecurity Officer

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) met recently to consider the issue of school closures in relation to the community transmission of COVID-19.

The Committee's advice is that pre-emptive school closures are not likely to be proportionate or effective as a public health intervention to prevent community transmission of COVID-19 at this time.

As Victoria's Chief Health Officer and as a member of the AHPPC, I fully endorse this advice in relation to schools in Victoria.

There is currently limited information on the contribution of children to transmission of COVID-19. The WHO-China Joint Mission noted the primary role of household transmission and observed that children tended to be infected from adults.

Previous work suggests that the potential reduction in community transmission from pre-emptive school closures may be offset by the care arrangements that are in place for children who are not at school.

There is a particular risk associated with the fact that children may require care from vulnerable grandparents or may continue to associate (and transmit infection) outside of school settings.

Broadly, the health advice on school closures from previous respiratory epidemics shows the health costs are often underestimated and the benefits are overestimated.

This may be even more so in relation to COVID-19 as unlike influenza, the impact on otherwise healthy children has been minimal to date.

For pre-emptive school closures to be effective, prolonged closure is required and it would be unclear when they could be re-opened. If there were still a large pool of susceptible students when schools are re-opened, there would be likely to be re-emergence of transmission in the community.

School closures may still be considered late in the outbreak in anticipation of a peak in infection rates, for a shorter period of time. Short term reactive school closures may also be warranted to allow cleaning and contact tracing to occur.

Should evidence change in relation to school closures then my advice to the sector, in collaboration with AHPPC, would of course change also.