

Mr Glen Seidel  
Secretary  
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*via email*

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Dear Glen

## **RE: COVID related return to school matters**

I refer to your letter to Dr Neil McGoran dated 1 February 2022. Dr McGoran has referred your letter to me for response.

Your letter sets out a number of matters, and these are addressed each one in turn below. Additionally, please find attached, for your information FAQs which were recently distributed to staff in our schools.

### **1. Masks**

In relation to masks, the Chief Public Health Officer has confirmed staff and students may wear whatever masks they prefer. I confirm that all CESA schools maintain a supply of surgical masks for staff to access, including to replace as required. Schools will not provide cloth masks; however, staff may choose to bring their own. You will note that the Staff FAQs include the following information:

***Q. What type of masks should be worn at schools/sites?***

*A. Staff and students may use any type of mask.*

***Q. Will my school/site supply masks for me to wear?***

*A. Each school/site has a supply of surgical masks for staff who prefer to access the school's supply and as a back-up if a cloth mask breaks. The Chief Public Health Officer does not recommend the wearing of N95 masks in education settings.*

***Q. How do mask exemptions work?***

*A. For some people mask wearing is not appropriate and SA Health sets out the exceptions to mask wearing on their website. Students/staff who don't wear masks because they satisfy an exception reason are not required to provide evidence of the reason/s for masks being unable to be worn.*

### **2. Rapid Antigen Tests**

In relation to Rapid Antigen Tests, the Department for Education is responsible for distributing RATs to all education sectors. As they are received, we are distributing these to staff for surveillance testing in early childhood settings and to school staff to be ready to 'test to stay' where that is required.

In relation to 'opt in' surveillance testing in early childhood settings, it is for staff themselves to 'opt in'. The classroom contact and ESO 1:1 close contact settings that are defined in the TTIQ for Preschool and Early Learning Settings apply equally to staff who opt in and those who do not.

### **3. Ventilation**

In relation to ventilation, CESA is following the advice of the Chief Public Health Officer and schools are ensuring that where practical, natural ventilation is maximised with doors and windows open. Additionally, CESA has purchased air purifiers to provide to sites where that has been determined as necessary. These are being progressively deployed.

The Staff FAQs set out in more detail where air purifiers are currently being used.

### **4. Staff Leave**

CESA has over the past two years provided for staff in times of site closure and allowed access to leave/s for those staff who have been unable to work as a direct result of COVID-19. We have a proven record of supporting our employees and will continue to work to minimise the impact for staff as effectively as we can. There have and will continue to be many changes to the environment in which we find ourselves. We will continue to respond through our policy and practice that can be flexible and adaptable to this rapidly evolving environment. Please see attached the leave table provided in Staff FAQs illustrating our approach.

### **5. Infectious Diseases Leave**

The Infectious Diseases Leave clause of the Enterprise Agreement sets out the applicable diseases for which such leave may be taken.

In your letter you note that an employer may apply the leave to other diseases recognised by the employer and notified to employees. No such recognition and notification has occurred with respect to COVID-19, which is a worldwide pandemic rather than a localised occurrence of an infectious disease.

As detailed above, in recognition of the unusual circumstances, CESA has provided for use of Special Paid Leave in particular circumstances associated with COVID-19. I refer you to the Staff FAQs which set this out clearly.

### **6. Pandemic Leave**

We understand that the claim for pandemic leave to be included in the Enterprise Agreement has been re-tabled for discussion. The position with respect to this leave remains the same as previously negotiated. The claim for pandemic and infectious diseases leave will continue to be addressed through the negotiating team.

### **7. Pregnant Women**

We are committed to ensuring the safety of our staff.

We agree that pregnant women may be eligible to transfer to a safe job or for no safe job leave in accordance with the NES in specific circumstances. However, working in schools is not inherently unsafe. We will continue to manage any requests for a safe job in accordance with the NES, and on a case-by-case basis.

### **8. Vulnerable Staff**

We understand that SA Health and the Department for Education are actively reviewing the information in relation to vulnerable people and will continue to monitor for any developments in that regard.

Consistent with the approach in responding to COVID-19 during the last two years, where there are workers with specific vulnerabilities, each of these will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

## 9. Mandatory Vaccination

CESA sites are complying with the relevant Emergency Management Direction in relation to vaccination in Education and Early Childhood settings. The current requirements are set out at section 5 of that Direction. We understand that it is likely that a further direction will be issued in the future in relation to a booster course.

With respect to our position on new employees, we must ensure that all new employees are work-ready to commence in our schools. This is to meet the Direction, and ensuring the health, safety and well-being of our current staff and students, we therefore require all new employees to be fully vaccinated.


Clause 5(1)(a) and (b) of the Direction only apply where the person has received their first dose by 10 December 2021. Accordingly, any person not vaccinated prior to 11 December 2021 must have received two doses before being able to work in Education and Early Childhood settings. Similarly, under clause 5(3)(v), unless and until the Chief Public Health Officer or their delegate has endorsed a person's medical exemption, they do not have a valid exemption under the Direction and are unable to work in Education and Early Childhood settings.

## 10. Delivery modes

I refer you to the email exchange with Tim Oosterbaan on this matter. In my email to Tim on Saturday 29 January, I confirmed that CESA correspondence regarding the Return to School Plan, clearly outlines that our teachers are not expected to work in 'dual mode'.

I trust this letter provides you with the information you are seeking. Please do not hesitate to contact me on 8301 6676 should you wish to discuss any matters therein.

Yours sincerely



Susan Young  
**Assistant Director – People, Leadership and Culture**

4 February 2022

Att      FAQs for CESA staff

# Frequently Asked Questions for CESA staff (28 January 2022)

*in relation to the Implementation of the COVID-19 Education Plan for Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary Schools in South Australia*

## 1. Close contacts

### **Q. What happens if someone at school is COVID-19 positive?**

A. From 31 January 2022, a new class of close contacts applies in educational settings known as “classroom contacts”.

A classroom contact is a student or staff member (teacher or ESO) who has been in a classroom, where a classroom member (student or staff) subsequently tests positive for COVID-19.

Students, without symptoms, who are classroom contacts can continue attending school, preschool and childcare. No rapid antigen testing will be required for them.

Teachers and ESOs who are classroom contacts will be provided with 7 days of rapid antigen testing in order to ‘test to stay’. Staff are required to test themselves at home and can continue attend the workplace with a negative result (more details below).

If any symptoms develop (even mild) students and staff must not attend school or early childhood sites and they must get tested for COVID-19.

Where a staff member is working in close proximity with individual students and one of those students tests positive for COVID-19 and where face masks were not able to be worn, ordinarily, that staff member would be required to quarantine for 7 days. However, under the Education Plan if the staff member is considered by the Principal to be of critical importance to the wellbeing of certain students, the staff member instead ‘test to each morning for 7 days and record a negative test each day to attend the workplace.

### **Q. If I am a classroom contact, how will I know?**

A. Families are required to inform the school/site if their child is found to be COVID-19 positive. Schools/sites will then inform staff who are classroom contacts.

### **Q. If I become a close contact of someone outside of school, do the education close contact settings apply?**

A. No. Where a staff member has been in contact with a COVID-19 positive case outside of school, the general close contact settings apply. That is, you are required to quarantine for 7 days and take RATs on Day 1 and 6. RATs are recommended by SA Health for close

contacts who are asymptomatic. As PCR tests are intended for people showing symptoms of COVID-19, SA Health requires a person taking a PCR test to complete their isolation even when they have a negative PCR result.

**Q. If I am quarantining prior to 31 January 2022 because I have become a close contact of someone at my school or early childhood education site in Week 0, can I move to 'test to stay' from 31 January 2022?**

A. Yes. As the new arrangements are effective in education settings from 31 January, if you are quarantining because you are close contact with someone at your school/site, you may 'test to stay' from 31 January for the balance of the 7 days during which you would have been quarantining. If you are unsure how the requirements apply to you, you should call SA Health on 1800 253 787 and advise your leader as soon as possible of the outcome.

**Q. Rolling test to stay periods – If a student is found to be COVID-19 positive on Tuesday and the teacher commences their 7 days test to stay on Wednesday, however another student tests positive on Thursday does the clock restart on Friday morning for the 7 days test to stay approach?**

A. Yes.

**Q. I've heard that you can't be a close contact if you have recently recovered from COVID-19. Is that correct?**

A. Yes. People who have recovered from previously testing positive to COVID-19 will not be considered a close contact for 30 days after they are cleared. This is because the virus can sometimes be detected on swabs after the infection, due to shedding of the virus.

The SA Health process is such that a person who is COVID-19 positive will be sent a clearance SMS from SA Health after 10 days of isolation to say they may leave isolation.

For 30 days after the date of the clearance SMS, that person will not be considered a close contact.

To be clear, in those circumstances, they will not be considered a classroom close contact, an ESO 1:1 close contact, a workplace close contact or a general close contact for 30 days after their clearance and will not need to 'test to stay'. If the 30 days expires part way through a 7-day period where classroom contacts or ESO 1:1 close contacts have been identified to 'test to stay', they will need to 'test to stay' for the balance of the 7 days.

Additionally, Early Childhood staff should not undertake surveillance testing during those 30 days.

## 2. Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs)

**Q. I am a classroom contact and need to 'test to stay'? Can I test at night instead of in the morning?**

A. No. RATs are sensitive when a person is at their most infectious so a RAT needs to be taken prior to leaving for work. Classroom contacts must test to stay before work for 7 consecutive calendar days. Part-time staff must also test for 7 consecutive calendar days.

**Q. How are RATs getting to my school/site?**

A. RATs distribution is being coordinated by the Department for Education to all school and early childhood education centres. The Department have indicated all sites will receive a supply of RATs by no later than 28 January. RATs are being provided at no cost.

**Q. What sort of RATs will be provided – nose or mouth swabs?**

A. This is unknown. Given RAT supply is difficult, it is likely that there will be a mixture of RATs distributed across schools/sites.

**Q. If I work in early childhood education and care, how does surveillance testing work?**

A. For ECEC staff who opt into thrice weekly surveillance testing, RATs will be provided by the site and the test must be taken before work on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. SA Health have confirmed that testing the night before is not appropriate because of the reduced sensitivity of RATs. Staff who work part-time and have opted into testing, must also test on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, irrespective of their scheduled working pattern.

**Q. How does surveillance testing or ‘test to stay’ work if I have recently recovered from COVID-19?**

A. As stated above under ‘Close Contacts’, people who have recovered from previously testing positive to COVID-19 will not be considered a close contact for 30 days after they are cleared. This is because the virus can sometimes be detected on swabs after the infection, due to shedding of the virus.

The SA Health process is such that a person who is COVID-19 positive will be sent a clearance SMS from SA Health after 10 days of isolation to say they may leave isolation.

For 30 days after the date of the clearance SMS, that person will not be considered a close contact.

To be clear, in those circumstances, they will not be considered a classroom close contact, an ESO 1:1 close contact, a workplace close contact or a general close contact for 30 days after their clearance and will not need to ‘test to stay’. If the 30 days expires part way through a 7-day period where classroom contacts or ESO 1:1 close contacts have been identified to ‘test to stay’, they will need to ‘test to stay’ for the balance of the 7 days.

Additionally, Early Childhood staff should not undertake surveillance testing during those 30 days.

### **3. Masks**

**Q. Who should be wearing masks at school/sites?**

A. Face masks are required in schools and early childhood settings for:

- all adults when indoors (except if the mask is significantly impeding ability to communicate while teaching) and
- students in Years 7 to 12 when indoors.

Masks are also strongly recommended for children in Years 3 to 6 when indoors.

**Q. What type of masks should be worn at schools/sites?**

A. Staff and students may use any type of mask.

**Q. Will my school/site supply masks for me to wear?**

A. Each school/site has a supply of surgical masks for staff who prefer to access the school's supply and as a back up if a cloth mask breaks. The Chief Public Health Officer does not recommend the wearing of N95 masks in education settings.

**Q. Will my school have child sized masks available?**

A. The Department for Education is coordinating the ordering of child-sized masks for all education sectors so that these can be distributed to primary schools. The Department have advised these will be delivered to schools in the first week of February.

**Q. How do mask exemptions work?**

For some people mask wearing is not appropriate and SA Health sets out the exceptions to mask wearing on their website.

Students/staff who don't wear masks because they satisfy an exception reason are not required to provide evidence of the reason/s for masks being unable to be worn.

## **4. Ventilation**

**Q. Why aren't air purifiers being used in all classrooms and care rooms?**

A. We are working closely with SA Health and the Department for Education to ensure that there is a consistent approach to the use of air purifiers in all schools. As an additional safety measure, air purifiers have already been supplied to schools including St Mark's College at Port Pirie and our two special schools, Our Lady of La Vang at Flinders Park and St Patrick's Special School at Dulwich Park. We will prioritise provision of air purifiers for schools in an area with low ambient air quality or for rooms with insufficient ventilation. We will also prioritise schools with students with high needs.

**Q. Natural ventilation is encouraged but if it is too hot to keep windows and doors open in my classroom, what then?**

A. SA Health has confirmed that schools should be pragmatic in applying the recommendation to maximise natural ventilation.

On very hot days, where classrooms, such as transportables, are uncomfortable with doors and windows open, they should be closed to allow the air conditioning to work effectively. This is necessary to ensure safe working and learning conditions. SA Health has suggested that teachers open windows and doors periodically over the course of the day where the air conditioning is sufficiently effective to enable this.

## 5. Staff Leave

### Q. What leave can I access when I am impacted by COVID-19?

A. The Directors are committed to ensuring staff will not be disadvantaged if they are sick/isolating/quarantining as a result of COVID-19 and have considered where it is appropriate to use paid Special Leave under the Enterprise Agreement in specific circumstances. Please refer the scenarios below in relation to staff leave:

Scenario	Approach effective 25 Jan 2022
<p>1. A staff member is sick with COVID-19 symptoms.</p>	<p>The staff member is expected to stay away from work and get tested. The Infectious Diseases Leave clause of the Enterprise Agreement is not applicable.</p> <p>If a staff member is unwell and unable to work, they should take personal (sick) leave.</p> <p>If a staff member does not have any personal leave available, they may apply for Special Leave with pay (Clause 21 of the Enterprise Agreement). Approval of paid Special Leave of up to 5 days is at the discretion of the Principal, taking into account individual circumstances.</p>
<p>2. A staff member is <i>not sick</i> but is required to isolate/quarantine.</p>	<p>Where reasonably practical, the Principal will enable the staff member to work from home.</p> <p>If the staff member is unable to effectively work from home, they may apply for Special Leave with pay (Clause 21 of the Enterprise Agreement). Approval of paid Special Leave of up to 5 days is at the discretion of the Principal, taking into account individual circumstances.</p>
<p>3. A staff member is confirmed to have contracted COVID-19, whether symptomatic or not.</p>	<p>The staff member must isolate for the required period as per SA Health directions.</p> <p>If the staff member is unwell and unable to work, refer Scenario 1.</p> <p>If the staff member is not sick, refer Scenario 2.</p>
<p>4. A staff member is caring for a family member who is required to quarantine/isolate.</p>	<p>Where reasonably practical, the Principal will enable the staff member to work from home.</p> <p>If the staff member is unable to effectively work from home, they may access Personal (carer's) leave.</p> <p>If a staff member does not have any personal leave available and does not have access to another form of paid leave to cover the required absence, they may apply for Special Leave with pay (Clause 21 of the Enterprise Agreement). Approval of paid Special Leave of up to 5 days is at the discretion of the Principal, taking into account individual circumstances.</p>



<p>5. A staff member is not sick or required to isolate but elects to stay home because of a COVID-19 related concern (eg. feeling vulnerable).</p>	<p>As the staff member has not been directed by SA Health or the employer to remain at home, in discussion with the Principal, they may access annual leave or long service leave or otherwise take leave without pay. Personal leave (available when a staff member is sick or caring for someone) is not available in these circumstances.</p>
<p>6. A staff member is directed to stay at home due to a partial or whole school closure.</p>	<p>Where reasonably practical, the Principal will enable the staff member to work from home.</p> <p>If the staff member is unable to effectively work from home, they will continue to receive their normal salary for up to 1 week.</p> <p>Casual staff directly employed by the school (e.g. TRT, OSHC, etc.) who were rostered to work during the school closure period are to be paid for the hours they would likely have worked, for up to 1 week.</p> <p>Where a closure is for longer than 1 week, additional advice will be provided to the school.</p>

## 6. Activities at school

### Q. Can I eat lunch in the staff room?

A. You are welcome to continue to access the staff room though where practical, you are asked to connect with colleagues in outside locations, rather than inside the staff room.

Masks are required to be worn in the staff room, unless eating. If you are eating indoors, you should maintain a physical distance from colleagues.

### Q. Can Student Teachers attend school sites?

A. Yes. All student teachers are required to be fully vaccinated in accordance with the Emergency Direction and may continue to attend school sites.

### Q. Can parents attend schools/sites to sign in students to OSHC or to sign in a child who arrives late?

A. Yes. They are required to check in on arrival and wear a mask at all times while indoors.

### Q. Do students need to maintain a specific physical distance from other students when indoors?

A. In classrooms, teachers should use the available space to spread students out however most effectively, there is not a specific social distancing requirement that applies. To be clear, there is no requirement for schools to be policing distancing between students inside or in the yard.

## 7. More information

Further information in relation to COVID-19 settings in schools is available at <https://www.cesa.catholic.edu.au/news/alerts>

### **Q. I have specific questions? Who can I send these to?**

- A. Where staff have queries in relation to the implementation of COVID-19 safe approaches for their particular school/site, these should be directed to the school/site leadership team in the first instance.