

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Mental Health



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GETTING REGIONAL STUDENTS SAFELY BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

The Victorian Government is ensuring students in regional Victoria can return to face-to-face learning as soon as possible – with a plan outlined to return regional areas to school quickly and safely in Term Four, alongside extra measures to protect school communities and detect outbreaks as early as possible.

A staggered return will see all regional students back at school at least part-time within the first two weeks of Term Four – with the exception of the City of Latrobe and Mitchell Shire, which are currently under stay-at-home restrictions.

From Monday 4 October, all Prep to Grade 2 and final year students will return to the classroom full-time, as they were at the end of Term Three. From Wednesday 6 October, once final year students have completed the GAT, regional Year 11 students will also return to prepare for their final assessments and exams.

From Monday 11 October, a staggered approach will apply so all students are back in the classroom at least part-time. Years 3-4 and 8-9 will attend school on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and Years 5-6 and 10 will attend on Thursdays and Fridays – while Year 7 will also return five days a week.

From Tuesday 26 October, all students will be back in the classroom full-time.

This plan provides for an earlier return than in metropolitan Melbourne – supporting students in lower-risk regions to get back to school faster, and giving the public health team the opportunity to monitor an earlier return to onsite learning and see if any further COVIDSafe measures are required.

There is still significant concern about the potential for the virus to spread across regional Victoria. If any regional LGA is returned to lockdown – as is the case with the City of Latrobe this week – all schools in that LGA will return to the metropolitan Melbourne school roadmap settings.

Students who live in metropolitan Melbourne but enrolled in a regional school – or vice-versa – will be able to attend onsite learning with their year level. Staff and final year students who are required to cross the metropolitan border to attend school must be double vaccinated, or must get tested twice weekly.

Strong measures will be in place to protect school staff, students and their communities – with ventilation, vaccination and vital COVIDSafe measures critical to ensuring schools can stay open throughout Term Four.

In order to keep regional communities safe and protect their low COVID status, a targeted waste-water detection program will be in place in some higher-risk regional LGAs, helping to detect any cases within school communities as early as possible.

The first delivery of the Government's 51,000 air purifiers has arrived in Victoria, with the devices to be installed in schools throughout Term Four to remove infectious particles from classrooms and prevent any potential spread of the virus.

All government and low-fee non-government schools across the state will also receive a grant of up to \$25,000 to purchase shade sails, as part of a \$60 million to create more outdoor learning spaces and make it easy for classes to be conducted outside as the warmer months approach.

School communities are leading the way when it comes to vaccinations. Already, 98 per cent of the 40,000 government school staff who have responded to a voluntary survey have received at least one dose of the vaccine – while single dose rates for 16-18 year olds are above 70 per cent, and above 40 per cent for 12-15 year olds.

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Masks are strongly encouraged for students as a way to ensure safety and limit the risk of transmission in school settings. Masks will remain mandatory for all students 12 and older, and all adults, and this will continue to be monitored in light of community transmission rates and changing risks.

Schools have already implemented measures like staggered pick-up and drop-off times, QR code check-ins for any essential visitors, and as much physical distancing as is possible in classrooms – and when students return, will limit mixing among year levels and use large spaces like halls and gyms where possible.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

“With lower case numbers and excellent vaccination rates, we’re looking forward to getting regional students back in the classroom as soon as possible in Term Four – but we need all school communities to stay vigilant and follow the COVIDSafe plans to protect these freedoms.”

“Now we’re ready to get all students back to school safely, we’ll make sure every single Victorian child gets the support they need – whether that’s with their schoolwork or their wellbeing.”