

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Mental Health
Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers



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NEW SETTINGS FOR SAFE, SUCCESSFUL VCE EXAMS

The public health team is making important changes to the management of school exposures and students who become primary close contacts – ensuring Year 12s can sit their VCE exams with confidence, while keeping the broader community safe.

These changes have been made possible by the efforts of every single Victorian who has stepped up to get vaccinated – particularly final year students themselves, with more than 80 per cent of 17-18 year-olds already at least single-dosed, giving the public health team the confidence to enable students to complete their exams.

VCE students who become primary close contacts will now have permission to attend their exams, while otherwise complying with the isolation orders that apply – which will be 14 days for unvaccinated students, or 7 days for those who are fully vaccinated.

These students will be able to sit exams in dedicated rooms with separate entrances either by themselves or safely distanced from other students who are also primary close contacts, depending on capacity. They will be supervised by staff wearing face shields and enhanced PPE in safely ventilated rooms that are cleaned between each use.

Each student who is a primary close contact will need to be tested every 48 hours in their first week after exposure, then again on day 13 – with regular testing the key to ensuring any potential virus is picked up early and contact tracing can begin to prevent further spread at exam sites or in the community.

The process for students who test positive for coronavirus will not change – they cannot attend school or their VCE exams, and they will receive a Derived Examination Score for any assessments they are forced to miss, with the Consideration of Educational Disadvantage process also taking their situation into account.

All VCE exam rooms will keep a registration of students and a seating plan that can be accessed for easy contact tracing, helping to keep the number of students and staff forced to isolate minimal.

Alongside work to ensure every VCE student can sit their exams safely, the Department of Education and Training is working with the Department of Health to minimise the disruption to learning for all other students in the event of a confirmed case at a primary or secondary school.

When there is a confirmed case, the school will generally be closed for an initial 24 hours while cleaning of any affected areas takes place, and while Department of Education staff work with school leaders to identify primary close contacts – who will then be contacted by the Department of Health for the standard contact tracing process.

Meanwhile, all other students will be able to return to onsite learning – generally the next day, unless there are further cases immediately associated with a school, in which case further contact tracing may be required.

In addition to a trial of rapid home testing for school communities, the Department of Health is working with the Department of Education and Training on an additional, wider trial of the use of rapid antigen testing in school settings as part of the suite of COVID safe measures for schools.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

“Our final year students have shown incredible resilience throughout the pandemic on top of trying to finish their schooling – it’s only right that we ensure as many students as possible sit their exams and finish the year strongly.”

“While these changes will allow students who are close contacts into schools for exams, we’re taking every precaution to make sure all other VCE students and our hardworking school staff are kept safe.”

Media contact: Matilda Edwards Jézéquel 0447 422 464 | matilda.edwards-jezequel@minstaff.vic.gov.au