

Thursday, 17 February 2022

EXTENDING COVIDSAFE MEASURES TO KEEP CLASSROOMS SAFE

After a safe and successful start to the school year, the Andrews Labor Government will extend its COVIDSafe measures in schools and early childhood settings until the end of Term 1.

Initially set to run for the first four weeks of Term 1, the measures – including rapid antigen surveillance testing – will continue until the end of term, and the Labor Government will more than double the number of air purifiers in schools to keep protecting students and staff.

The Labor Government will distribute an extra 24 million RATs to schools and early childhood services to continue the program until the end of Term 1. The school surveillance testing program has been extremely effective at reducing transmission in schools – with Burnet Institute modelling estimating that, assuming a 75 per cent compliance rate with screening of students, the program has prevented more than 21,000 COVID-19 infections.

Continuing the RAT surveillance for the full 10 weeks of Term 1 is expected to prevent more than 61,000 COVID-19 infections in children aged 5 to 17, more than 150,000 COVID-19 infections in the community (on average 2,100 less infections per day), and around 400 hospital admissions.

The testing settings will remain the same, with all primary and secondary school students and staff, and early childhood education and care staff and children aged 3 to 5, recommended to test at home twice a week, while students and staff at specialist schools are recommended to test five days a week.

With global supply increasing, and in anticipation of colder weather when windows may have to be shut and outdoor learning reduced, the Labor Government will deliver a further 60,000 air purifiers – enough to cover every single classroom in government schools and low-fee non-government schools

This will bring the total number of air purifiers in schools to 111,000 units. The second tranche of air purifiers will start delivery later this term and air purifiers will be with schools by 1 June – in time for the beginning of winter.

Eligible kindergarten services will receive a further \$3.8 million in grants to support ventilation improvements and keep children and staff safer at kinder, and give families confidence that early learning is safe. The new grants will be available later this term to support the purchase of air purifiers for learning spaces or other improved ventilation.

Vaccination remains the best way to protect students and staff – with parents and carers urged to continue booking children aged 5 to 11 in for their first and second doses, and staff and students aged 16 to 17 reminded to get their third dose as soon as possible.

School and early childhood staff must receive a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine by 25 February to continue working in education settings, unless they have a valid exemption. For staff who became fully vaccinated after 25 October 2021, this deadline is 15 March, unless they have a valid exemption.

Quote attributable to Premier Daniel Andrews

“We promised we’d get our kids back to school safely and on time, and that’s exactly what we’ve done – and we’ll make sure the rest of the 2022 school year is just as good.”

Quote attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

“The 2022 school year has kicked off safely and successfully - and we’re supporting that to continue, with more rapid tests, more air purifiers and higher vaccination rates to keep our schools safe and open.”

Quote attributable to Minister for Early Childhood Ingrid Stitt

“Our littlest learners are still unable to be vaccinated – so we’re continuing strong COVIDSafe measures to protect kinder kids, and those who care for them, in kinder services across the state.”

For information about coronavirus visit coronavirus.vic.gov.au or call 1800 675 398.