



28 January 2022

Dear St Joseph's College families

Welcome to the 2022 school year. As you would be aware, the Victorian Government recently outlined its Back-To-School plan. The measures set out in the plan are designed to ensure every possible effort is made to ensure staff and students are safe and that schools remain open.

There is extensive information within this correspondence, based on the Operational Guide of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria in collaboration with the Department of Education. We want to provide families with the best information regarding key aspects of the Back-To-School plan to support your student/s return safely to school.

Rapid Antigen Testing

Free rapid antigen tests will be made available for all staff and students in Victorian schools for the first four weeks of Term 1 2022. Rapid antigen testing will be **voluntary** for all primary, secondary and specialist school students and staff. We hope that families will take up this opportunity to secure the safety of each member of our school community.

Rapid antigen test kits will be provided directly to students during homeroom in week one and week three. A skoolbag message will be sent to families advising of the distribution. Please ensure you store your tests safely as the college will be unable to offer replacements.

Students and staff will do the tests at home and must report any positive test results to the College.

If staff or students receive a positive test result at any time, they must report this through the Department of Health system ([Rapid antigen tests | Coronavirus Victoria](#)) or via the coronavirus hotline on 1800 675 398.

Students or their parents must also report a positive result to the college, by phone or written notification; this is so the college can support them, record that they will be absent while in 7-day isolation, and let the rest of the school community know there has been a positive case onsite and that they should monitor for symptoms.

Advice for Positive Cases

All students and staff who return a positive result from a rapid antigen test should also follow the latest government health advice at <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/rapid-antigen-tests>.

Information about how to do a test, including a how-to video translated into 33 languages, is available [online](#).

Students who report a **positive result must isolate for seven days** and not attend school during that period.

Where a student is a household contact of a positive case (**that is, they have spent more than four hours with someone who has COVID-19 inside a house, accommodation, or care facility**) they must inform the college, isolate for seven days and not attend school during that period.

We will notify the college community through email when a student or staff member has (or multiple students or staff members) have returned a positive COVID-19 test result and have attended the college or school activities. The notification will protect the privacy of the individual but will include:

- Dates of attendance
- Affected group/cohort/year levels
- Any relevant extracurricular activities undertaken

The notification may be provided to only the affected group/cohort/year level or we may notify the whole college community depending on the circumstances and the risks.

Staff and students **must not return to the college** while they remain symptomatic, unless it is known that their symptoms are caused by an underlying health condition or medication.

Students who are required to isolate or quarantine will be supported by the college in the same way as students with an extended absence due to illness or injury, with learning materials provided. The level of support will depend on the capacity of the college to support continued learning and the number of staff available to do so. The college is not able to provide a full remote learning program in these circumstances.

What to do in the event of a COVID-19 exposure or a positive result?

A student tests positive to COVID19, either through RA test or PCR test

- Isolate at home or in private accommodation for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and do not attend school during this period.
- Inform the college that they have tested positive to COVID-19.
- A negative test is not required to return to school following completion of 7 days of isolation.
- Follow the Checklist for COVID cases located at:
<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/checklist-cases>

A student is a household contact to a positive COVID-19 case:

- You have spent more than four hours with someone who has COVID-19 inside a house, accommodation, or care facility.
- Follow the Checklist for COVID contacts. <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/checklist-cases>
- **Student must quarantine for 7 days** (inclusive of weekends) and **must not attend school** during this period.
- Contact at school is not included in this definition, unless contact has occurred in a school based residential setting, e.g. school camp or boarding school.

A student has been in contact with a case of COVID-19 at school:

- If **asymptomatic**, students should continue to attend school and monitor for symptoms.
- If **symptomatic**, all students must stay or return home, take a rapid antigen test, or get a PCR test if a rapid antigen testing kit is unavailable.
- On receipt of a negative test result, and if well enough, the student can return to school. If students are too unwell to attend school, usual leave/absence policies apply.

Follow the Checklist for COVID contacts. <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/checklist-cases>

Learning Continuity

Our college community is deeply committed to providing learning continuity, and ensuring that each child and young person has the best possible learning experience in 2022. We have a range of contingencies in place if members of our staff team contact COVID or are required to isolate as household contacts. We do anticipate that maintaining a full roster of staff may be a challenging issue over the coming weeks and we want families to be aware that we may need to ask particular year levels to stay home on a rotational basis so that we can provide an adequate duty of care and quality learning onsite. This may occur on relatively short notice. Any decision to cancel school or move to home-based learning will be after we have exhausted our other staffing options including, but not limited to,

- Drawing on our regular pool of committed and professional pool of casual relief teachers
- Utilising non-classroom teachers and school leaders redeployed into the classroom on some occasions
- Reducing school activities that draw teachers away from the classroom, such as professional learning programs and co-curricular activities
- Work with neighbouring schools to address staffing concerns
- Working with part time staff to extend their available hours where possible.

Any decision to cancel school or move students to home based learning for particular grades and or year levels will be as a last resort. This would be rotated to avoid the same groups having their learning impacted.

Parents and Visitors coming onsite

We appreciate the start of the school year is a challenging time regarding parents and carers coming onsite. In the early weeks of this year we are limiting parents, carers and visitors who enter college buildings to reduce the risk of transmission. The college is aware of the challenges that the current restrictions impose and is required to observe the following requirements.

When parents, carers and visitors enter college buildings they are required to check in with a QR code and have the school confirm that they are fully vaccinated. This is not required if you are just dropping off or picking up your student.

We ask all parents, carers and visitors to practise respiratory etiquette and good hand hygiene, and observe physical distancing, and face mask requirements when onsite.

Any parent, carer or visitor who enter college buildings must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or have a valid medical exemption, with the following limited exceptions:

- When attending to administer medical treatment to their own child when the treatment cannot be administered by the college
- When attending to collect their child who is unwell and cannot leave the college building unaccompanied by their parent/carer
- When attending for a momentary period that does not involve any sustained contact with staff or students, for example, to collect a completed art project or similar

As we are able to welcome parents, carers and visitors onsite for any event or activity inside a college building including, but not limited to, tours, graduations, transitions and whole-college events, each person visiting will be required to show evidence of vaccination.

Meetings, parent/teacher conferences and other discussions (such as Parent/Student Support Group meetings) with **visitors** who do not meet vaccination requirements will be held virtually.

Parents, carers and visitors attending college sites for drop-off and pick-up who do not enter college buildings do not need to comply with vaccination requirements.

Our college will only visually verify the vaccination status of a visitor, no information is recorded or retained.

Student Attendance

While families may be nervous about students returning to school, all students are expected to attend onsite. Parent preference is not an approved reason for students to be absent due to COVID-19. Students who are required to isolate or quarantine will be supported in the same way as students with an extended absence due to illness or injury, with learning materials provided to support their continued learning. Schools are not expected to provide a full remote learning program in these circumstances.

Students who may be medically vulnerable

In keeping with expert public health advice, some students (or families) may be at higher risk for severe outcomes or complications of COVID-19, for example those with chronic medical conditions. Parents or carers of any student with a chronic medical condition should seek advice from their medical practitioner about attending school on-site. If you have a child or children who are medically vulnerable please reach out to us here at the college, so we can work with you regarding the medical needs and your up-to-date condition-specific health management plan (such as an Asthma Action Plan).

Face Masks

Face masks have proved an effective protection in previous outbreaks and are again a key protection:

- All students must wear a face mask indoors at school, unless a lawful exception applies. Students must wear face masks even if vaccinated. Students are not required to wear masks outside.
- When attending outdoor school camps and excursions, face masks are not mandatory, unless physical distancing cannot be maintained. Face masks must continue to be worn when indoors on camps and excursions.
- Everyone over eight years old must wear a face mask when travelling to and from school on public transport, taxis or rideshare vehicles.
- School staff must wear a face mask in all indoor settings, except where removal of a face mask is necessary for effective communication or teaching.
- Visitors to schools aged eight and above must wear a face mask in all indoor spaces, unless a lawful exception applies.

VCE/VCAL/VET provision in schools, TAFEs, non-school senior secondary providers and other training organisations

Students can participate in face-to-face VCE or VCAL classes, including VET studies, where these are held at TAFEs, RTOs, non-school senior secondary providers, or schools. These providers may have their own requirements and families will be notified of these ahead of classes commencing.

Non-classroom based activities

In planning for all non-classroom based activities (such as school assemblies) and extracurricular activities, including camps, excursions, other out-of-school activities, incursions and learning activities such as sport, music and the arts during the first four weeks of term, we will give consideration to whether the activity can be completed in a COVID Safe manner, for example completed in smaller groups or conducted outside. Where we have the staffing capacity we will make every effort to conduct the activity in a COVID safe way, after conducting the appropriate risk assessment and keeping you, our families, informed of the procedures we have in place.

Air purifiers

Our college has received delivery of a number of Air Purifiers to be used throughout the school. Air purifiers are advised to be prioritised for higher risk areas. These areas include high traffic areas with lesser access to external ventilation.

Wellbeing

For some families the media and reporting surrounding the return to school will cause increased nervousness and concern in children and young people. There are a range of resources to support parents and carers on page 3 of the attached document.

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/quick-guide-to-student-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources.pdf>

Smiling Mind has also created digital Care Packs to support the mental health of kids aged five to 12. The resources can be downloaded from the Smiling Mind website Each pack includes brief learning tools as well as activities for children to use within the home or school environment. To download the pack, see: [Smiling Mind Digital Care Packs](#)

If you have school specific questions, please contact college reception on 5018 8000.

Stay home when unwell and get tested

The most important action school communities can take to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 is to ensure that any unwell students remain at home and get tested, even with the mildest of symptoms. Everyone should consider their health before they attend school, and ensure that they are free from coronavirus symptoms and have not had recent contact with a person confirmed or suspected to have coronavirus.

Looking Ahead

We look forward to a very positive year ahead working with staff and families in the education of your child. These guidelines are designed to keep everyone safe and able to continue with their learning. We express our gratitude to all families for your continued cooperation in following the above guidelines and ask that you contact the college if there are any further areas of concern.

Your sincerely

p.p.



The College Leadership Team