

2021 Return to Face-to-face Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ was originally published on 17 September 2021 and includes updates published on 13 October 2021. It was correct at the time of writing. Please ensure that you keep up-to-date with advice from your employer, the AEU and health authorities.

New material published 13 October 2021

1. What are schools doing to ensure adequate ventilation?

According to the Education Directorate's FAQs:

All schools are conducting ventilation assessments and putting plans in place to increase fresh air circulation in learning areas. All schools will have an Indoor Air Quality Plan by the time students return.

Outdoor learning will be encouraged wherever possible. School HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems will be adjusted to increase the fresh air being supplied to classrooms. Classrooms that are not connected to these systems have external natural ventilation so that fresh air source can be readily controlled. Previously fixed closed windows are being re-opened after re-assessing the safety reason for their closure.

The AEU is advised that Infrastructure and Capital Works staff are conducting a complete assessment of every Education Directorate workplace to ensure that all spaces are adequately ventilated. Where this is not possible, alternative control measures (such as limiting use of those spaces) should be expected. Members should raise concerns with their manager or their Health and Safety Representative in the first instance.

2. Why not just use air purifiers (HEPA filters)?

Sometimes the simplest safety measures are the best. Outside air ventilation is the most effective control measure (for example, through mechanical ventilation systems or opening windows). Air purifiers are a secondary safety measure. They do not replace natural and mechanical ventilation methods but may complement them. There is insufficient evidence at present to show that air purifiers are effective at reducing or preventing Covid-19 transmission.

The ACT Government has announced \$5.7million in funding towards measures to improve Covid safety in schools, including improvements to ventilation systems and building works.

3. What will happen if it is very hot/cold/there is bushfire smoke and we can't leave the windows open?

Schools will need to develop plans for managing circumstances where the usual measures for ventilation are disrupted. These will vary site-by-site and may depend on factors such as the availability of appropriate mechanical ventilation. Schools should already have plans for managing extreme temperatures in accordance with Directorate policy.

Members should raise concerns with their manager or via their Health and Safety Representative in the first instance.

4. I have questions about my school's Covid plans – who should I direct them to?

Members should raise questions with their manager or via their Health and Safety Representative in the first instance. Members can also consult the information, including FAQs, provided by the Directorate on its internal and external websites.

Material published 17 September 2021

5. Will I be consulted on the proposed return to onsite learning and how will this consultation take place?

Yes. Consultation is a key aspect of the implementation of any plans for the return to onsite learning. The Education Directorate is holding consultation sessions with AEU sub-branch Representatives and HSRs in colleges as a priority. Individual site arrangements will be subject to consultation locally with the school staff and school leadership.

The AEU office will continue to represent members in consultation and negotiations with the Directorate on high-level decisions. If you require assistance with consulting on a matter at your site, please contact the AEU office for support.

6. Will there be access to Personal Protective Equipment and sanitising equipment at my site?

Yes. Each site will be required to complete a checklist to ensure there is adequate PPE and cleaning supplies available. The checklist includes hand sanitiser, hand wash and paper towels, masks, gloves, and disinfectant wipes.

7. If my school becomes a close contact site what will be the process?

Affected site/s would be closed to all students and staff for at least 1-2 days while contact tracing and cleaning occurred. The period of closure would be determined on a case-by-case basis by ACT Health.

Students from impacted sites would stay home and formal remote learning would not be offered. It is acknowledged that learning may be interrupted, and this will be considered by schools during assessment.

All staff, students and visitors will be required to follow ACT Health direction regarding testing and isolation.

In the event that your site is a close contact site, please ensure that you pay close attention to communications from your school leadership, the Directorate and ACT Health.

8. If I live in NSW and must travel to the ACT for work, what information do I need to carry with me to provide if I am stopped?

This situation will remain the same for all staff travelling from an approved postcode. The list of approved postcodes can be found at <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/travel/nswact-border-residents>. There is a standing exemption to enter if you are an essential worker.

You will need to carry your Drivers Licence identifying your home address in one of the approved postcodes and evidence of your essential worker status (eg. your TQI card or identification as a school staff member). The Directorate will also seek a group exemption from ACT Health for affected

staff. If you encounter issues when crossing over into the ACT, you should make contact with your supervisor as soon as practicable. The AEU office will also be available to provide support.

9. If I am vulnerable or care for a vulnerable person and cannot attend the school site what are my options?

If you are vulnerable or care for a vulnerable person and reasonable adjustments to your workplace are insufficient to mitigate risk, your school should enable you to work from home if possible. If this is not possible, COVID-19 leave is available.

Discuss arrangements in the first instance with your principal. If an appropriate arrangement cannot be found, People and Performance can assist and support managers/supervisors and staff to find a solution. Assistance will also be available to members from the AEU office.

10. If I am deemed a close contact or develop COVID like symptoms, can I access COVID leave for the test and subsequent isolation?

If you develop any COVID-19 related symptoms, you should not attend work under any circumstances.

If you are ill, you need to stay home and not perform work. Personal leave is the appropriate leave type in this instance. If you are ill and required to access COVID-19 testing and subsequently must isolate, personal leave is appropriate so long as you remain unfit for work.

If you are fit for work but have been required to quarantine or isolate, your school should enable you to work from home if possible. If this is not possible, COVID-19 leave is available.

For more information about circumstances where Covid-19 leave is available, information is available on the ACTPS Employment Portal (<https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/employment-framework/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-actps-employees-and-managers>). Members can also contact the AEU office for advice.

11. If I am not fully vaccinated and do not feel comfortable attending the school site what are my options?

If staff are not feeling comfortable returning to the workplace they should discuss with their supervisor to determine what support or flexibility can be provided, including work from home arrangements.

The individual circumstances of staff must be considered to determine which staff are required to attend school, including staff who are vulnerable to COVID-19 or have members of their household who are vulnerable.

People and Performance staff can assist and support managers/supervisors and staff with these situations. We also encourage members, including school leader members, to seek assistance from the AEU office if necessary.

12. If students are non-compliant with the direction to wear masks indoors, what can I do to handle the situation? Who do I call? What are my options to remove them from my class?

Students who are required to wear masks can be given a direction to wear a mask by any school staff member, in accordance with regular student engagement practices.

If a student refuses to comply with the staff member's direction, the staff member should follow the school's usual process for dealing with persistent non-compliant behaviour, including seeking support from an executive teacher to ensure that the student either complies with health and safety requirements or is removed from class.

Persistent, non-compliant behaviour that presents a risk to health and safety may lead to the student being suspended from school or diverted to an alternative program of learning where their behaviour will not place others at risk.

13. I have school aged children at home, if I am required to teach onsite will I be able to send my children to their regular school?

Yes. As a teacher or school based staff you are considered an essential worker. This will allow you to send your children to their regular school for onsite supervision if you are required to attend the workplace to facilitate the return to onsite learning.

14. What options are available if I do not feel comfortable sending my children to a school site? Can I access work from home or leave?

If staff are not feeling comfortable returning to the workplace they should discuss with their supervisor to determine what support or flexibility can be provided, including work from home arrangements.

Flexibility during these times will be a key aspect of the approach. The extent of the flexibility available will depend on your personal circumstances. This may look like a continuation of work from home requirements or accessing leave. COVID leave may also be available in some circumstances.

In the first instance we encourage you to raise your concerns with your manager. If you are still experiencing concerns or have not been able to reach an agreement, get in touch with the AEU office for further advice and assistance.

15. I am a casual worker. If lockdown continues, what are the arrangements for payment if I am not required onsite or do not feel comfortable attending onsite learning?

Eligible casual teachers should have received an email outlining their access to an averaged pay entitlement. This arrangement is designed to cover casual staff for the duration of lock down. If you are requested to return to onsite learning and do not feel comfortable doing so you should have a discussion with the EDU SIMS Team to raise your concerns.

At this stage the current arrangements in place will cover casual staff until the end of lock down. If there is any change to this arrangement further communications will be provided to casual staff.

16. What are the arrangements for assessment and reporting in Semester 2

The Education Directorate has provided schools with information regarding assessment and reporting requirements. If you have questions or concerns about this advice, please raise them with your school leadership in the first instance. If those concerns are not resolved, the AEU office can provide support.