

Coronavirus (COVID -19)

Information for school staff

How you can support students

Students in your class will most likely have knowledge of coronavirus (COVID-19) and will have seen and heard conversations and news footage. It is perfectly normal for children to have questions about events that are covered in the media. Children look to the significant adults in their lives for guidance on how to manage their reactions. As their teacher you can help your students by remaining calm, maintaining currency with the facts and through providing reassurance that the situation is being handled appropriately.

There is a common misunderstanding that talking with children about a topic such as coronavirus may increase their anxiety. This is not the case. Teachers play an important role in listening to students and answering their questions as honestly as possible. You should also act sensitively to correct any misunderstandings. This will help students feel informed and understand what is happening. Older students may be accessing information on social media. It can be helpful to get them to find facts and talk about how misinformation can lead to confusion.

You should ensure that you are up to date with the facts from reliable sources as this will help keep conversations calm, considered, and constructive. Provide facts in words that are appropriate to the age of the students.

Students can become distressed when a classmate is away, believing that they may have contracted the virus. You can explain that others may be absent for a number of reasons including just wanting to take extra precautions during this time. This can act to help reassure students.

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remind students that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness – not coronavirus.

It is important to remain vigilant for any signs of students being ostracised or bullied. Individuals may be particularly vulnerable when returning to school after an absence.

Some practical advice

During this time practical measures can be undertaken to minimise risks to you and your students. For example you can limit activities that require

students to work closely in groups. You can display posters and other visual aids depicting good hygiene. You can also remind students to:

- [wash their hands frequently with soap and water](#) – before and after eating and after going to the toilet. For younger students you may need to explicitly teach what good handwashing looks like and make time in the day to do this prior to food breaks
- cover their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze (coughing into their elbow is a useful strategy)
- avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth before washing their hands
- limit physical contact when greeting people
- limit physical contact on the playground

These are easy habits for students to adopt, and should help them feel as though they are able to exert some control over their circumstances.

If a student in your class appears unwell. Follow the normal school procedures for a sick child.

If you have a student who is remaining at home because of sickness or needing to self-isolate, it is important to send work home either digitally or by mail so that they can keep up to date with their work. Check with your supervisor as to how best to arrange this. Ensure the student is not ostracised when they return.

Communication is important

- check [the department's response to novel coronavirus](#) for current information.
- read any information distributed to staff

Where to get help

- call the National Coronavirus Health Information line (1800 020 080)
- review the [NSW Health](#) coronavirus website for the latest information and advice

If you are personally concerned and would like additional support the following services are available

- Employee Assistance Program (EAPs – contact 1800 060 650)
- Beyond Blue – 1300 22 4636
- Lifeline – 13 11 14