Chief Health Officer Letter: Advice for parents on returning to school

SSTUWA
State School Teachers' Union of WA

Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Dear parents and carers

Chief Health Officer advice for parents on returning to schools

The COVID-19 pandemic is, and will continue to be, a very worrying time for many parents and carers as we see the devastation caused by this virus around the world. Importantly, schools are a central part of a child's life. They provide stability, a sense of achievement and a rich learning environment for every child. This is especially important at a time when many children and young people are feeling stressed about COVID-19 and worried about what the future may hold.

Fortunately, Western Australia (WA) has been spared from widespread disease through effective border controls, contact tracing, quarantine and social distancing measures, and currently has very few cases and no evidence of community spread. I encourage you and your families to keep up the good work, as we have achieved a lot, but we need to maintain our efforts for some time to come. Thank you for all that you are doing.

My job is to ensure that the Western Australian community stays as healthy and disease free as possible. Together with the Chief Health Officers in other States and Territories, I have weighed up the pros and cons of children attending school.

With the very low levels of COVID-19 in Western Australia, along with the wider public health strategies now in place, I strongly believe there is no need for school closures in this state currently. Even when we had higher rates of disease in our state, only 1.5% of cases were school students, all of whom had mild illness and have fully recovered. There also was no spread between students or to teachers. I encourage families to feel comfortable and safe about sending their children to school.

However, if your child has a chronic medical condition or a compromised immune system, you may wish to consult your GP or paediatrician when deciding if your child should return to school.

I have been working closely with the Department for Education, Catholic Education and the Independent Schools Board to make schools as safe as possible for everyone. This includes increasing cleaning schedules, making sure there is soap and tissues for students and staff, having protocols in place to practice social distancing, not having large gatherings of the school community and teaching children, however young, to avoid passing on germs.

We have a clear protocol for a minimum 24-hour closure in the event of a case of COVID-19 in a school, to allow us to contact anyone at risk and to undertake a deep clean. These rigorous protocols have been adopted previously without further issues.

If your child/children are well, I encourage you to send them back to school this term. If they have symptoms of a cold or have a fever, please keep them at home until they are better. If you are concerned they may have contracted COVID-19, they can be tested through our COVID Clinics or in private collection centres.
I wish you and your child/children all the very best in health and education for term 2.

Yours sincerely

DR ANDY ROBERTSON
Chief Health Officer

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Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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