

COVID-19 in Victorian schools and childcare mainly driven by community transmission, analysis finds

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COVID-19 cases in schools and childcare are mainly driven by community transmission and off-site learning should be a last resort, a new report has found.

The Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) has prepared a COVID-19 in Victorian Schools Report at the request of the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Department of Education and Training (DET). The report recommends schools and [childcare](#) centers should re-open as soon as community transmission of coronavirus falls and stays low.

Professor Fiona Russell, who led the MCRI analysis team said, "Over the past three months, [school](#) and childcare COVID-19 outbreaks were far more likely in those areas that also had high community levels, suggesting community transmission drives COVID-19 spread in schools. The single best policy to support school reopening prior to the development of a vaccine or treatment

is suppression of COVID-19."

The report analyzed DHHS and DET data which included reported COVID-19 cases and outbreaks across all early childhood and primary and secondary educational settings in Victoria from 25 January to 31 August.

Cases associated with schools accounted for eight percent of all cases in Victoria. From almost one million Victorian school students, 337 students (0.03 percent) may have acquired COVID-19 via a school outbreak.

It found 113 known events (involving a single case or more) in childcare with 234 cases potentially acquiring COVID-19 via events linked to childcare.

Of 373 students and 139 staff who were potentially infected through a childcare or school outbreak, four students and four staff were admitted to hospital, all of whom subsequently recovered.

The report's senior co-author MCRI Professor Sharon Goldfeld said, "Childcare and schools play a critical role not only in providing education, but also offer critical support, especially for the most vulnerable of students, which makes them a priority for opening and remaining open. Closing schools should be a last resort, especially for childcare and [primary school children](#) as cases in this age group are less likely to transmit and be associated with an outbreak."

Although the report was not able to determine the direction of transmission, the authors anticipate that this data will be gathered in term 4 if any additional outbreaks occur.

The report also provided detailed plans to prevent possible outbreaks following the staged easing of

lockdown restrictions which would follow a traffic light system. These plans have drawn on experiences from international settings, designed to reduce day-to-day disruptions as far as possible, while ensuring that teachers, students and the wider community are kept as safe as possible.

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

Key findings:

- Of one million students enrolled, 337 (0.03 percent) had an infection linked to a school outbreak
- 113 known events (involving a single case or more) in childcare with 234 cases potentially acquiring COVID-19 via events linked to childcare.
- 1,635 infections were linked with childcare and schools in some way, out of a total of 19,901 infections in Victoria. Cases associated with schools accounted for eight percent of all infections in Victoria
- Testing, tracing and isolation within 48 hours of a notification is the most important strategy to prevent an outbreak. In Victoria, the average time between confirmation of the first case in childcare or school and education provider closure was two days. This timely response prevented outbreaks from occurring as 66 percent of outbreaks in schools involved just a single [infection](#) in a staff member or [student](#) and 91 percent involved fewer than 10 cases
- Of 139 infected staff and 373 infected students who may have acquired COVID via a childcare or school outbreak, eight (four staff and four students) were admitted to hospital and all recovered
- Infections in childcare and schools were rarely linked to infections in the most vulnerable population, the elderly
- If the first case was a child aged 0-5 years, an [outbreak](#) (two or more cases) was very uncommon

More information: COVID-19 in Victorian Schools Report: www.mcri.edu.au/sites/default/.../25sept_execsum_1.pdf

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