



**Hon Sue Ellery MLC
Minister for Education and Training
Leader of the Legislative Council**

Message from the Minister

We are in extraordinary and challenging times and things are changing rapidly. Everybody is anxious, and I understand that.

As parents you want to know that the best decisions are being made, with safety as the first priority, and I want to reassure you that they are.

Schools are safe places, and we are doing everything we can to ensure that continues.

We have more than 317,000 students across more than 818 public schools in WA.

It is essential every student can continue their learning, despite what is going on around us, and we have put in measures to ensure they can do that safely.

WA schools are following a national approach.

I would like to reassure you though that each and every education decision is being made with students and school staff front of mind and acting on the advice of the Chief Health Officer.

There are two types of potential school closures, a re-active one in the event of a positive test result and a pre-emptive school closure in the absence of any positive tests.

The Chief Health Officer is a member of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and they have adopted a uniform national position on the issue of school operations in relation to the community transmission of COVID-19.

All chief health officers from around Australia agree that there is no need to close schools as a pre-emptive measure at this point.

Previous work suggests that the potential reduction in community transmission from pre-emptive school closures may be offset by the care arrangements that are in place for children who are not at school, for example if front line health and emergency services staff cannot attend work because their children are not at school. Children may require care from vulnerable grandparents or may continue to associate (and transmit infection) outside of school settings.

For pre-emptive school closures to be effective, prolonged closure is required and it would be unclear when they could be re-opened. If there were still a large pool of susceptible students when schools are re-opened, there would likely be re-emergence of transmission in the community.

Allowing schools to stay open, but with clear guidelines, will assist in the safety and well-being of our staff and students, continue the focus on learning and regular routine in this difficult time, and ensure our most vulnerable students are observed, fed, and able to maintain hygiene processes.

School closures may still be considered later in the outbreak, in anticipation of a peak in infection rates. Short term reactive school closures may also be warranted to allow contact tracing and cleaning to occur.

Our school staff are professionals. They are great at their jobs and they are passionate about your children getting the very best education. They are implementing a range of strategies to reduce transmission. This includes educating students about the importance of handwashing, reducing face contact and cough etiquette, as well as cleaning high touch surfaces regularly.

Social distancing is important, and I know schools are sensibly taking extra precautions.

We all have a role to play in slowing the spread. I ask you to follow the restrictions around international travel and self-isolation. If your child does not have symptoms, there is no reason to be tested. But if your child is unwell for any reason, keep them at home until they are completely well.

The Department of Education will continue to seek the advice of the Chief Health Officer to ensure schools have the latest information to keep students and staff safe.

At this point the current health advice is that with sensible precautions in place, schools are safe.

While we will not be immune, WA schools will be well prepared. I know this is tough, and it will be tough for the coming weeks and months, but by working together we'll get through it.

Please be kind to the staff at your school. They too are working through a continually evolving situation and, while caring for their own families, they are also caring for yours. They are doing an outstanding job in uncertain times.

I know how hard this is and how hearing all sorts of different "expert views" makes it even harder. The situation is still evolving and I give you my personal commitment to continue to make decisions based on the best advice available to me.

SUE ELLERY MLC
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING