

12th March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Novel Coronavirus – COVID-19 Update

Further to my brief message in this week's newsletter, I am writing to update you on the current situation at Emmaus Christian College regarding the Novel Coronavirus – COVID 19.

Let me firstly provide information about isolation, exclusion and good hygiene practices:

1. Isolation Requirements

In accordance with Government guidelines, self-isolation must be adopted in particular situations. As at the 9th March, you must isolate yourself in the following circumstances:

- If you have left, or transited through mainland China or Iran in the last 14 days, you must isolate yourself for 14 days from the date of leaving mainland China/Iran.
- If you have left, or transited through the Republic of Korea on or after 5 March 2020 you must isolate yourself for 14 days after the date of leaving the Republic of Korea.
- If you have been in close contact with a proven case of coronavirus, you must isolate yourself for 14 days from the date of last contact with the confirmed case.

Travellers from Italy must present for health screening upon arrival in Australia, as directed at the border.

Updated information on travel restrictions and isolation requirements are available on the Australian Government's website here - <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>.

We continue to expect that all parents and carers within the School community will ensure that they are aware of and comply with these requirements.

When students are subject to isolation arrangements, we will work with you to ensure that they are provided with learning resources and materials to assist them in maintaining their studies. We are currently developing strategies to provide sustained ongoing support to larger groups of students should this become necessary.

2. Good Hygiene Practices

Within the School we have taken steps to increase the awareness of appropriate good hygiene practices to protect against infections. Good hygiene includes:

- washing your hands frequently with soap and water, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet,
- covering your cough and sneeze, disposing of tissues, and using alcohol-based hand sanitiser, and
- if unwell, avoiding contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people).

Surgical masks are only helpful in preventing people who have coronavirus disease from spreading it to others and are generally not recommended.

We hope that you will reinforce these good hygiene practices at home with your children.



3. Exclusion of students with COVID-19 Symptoms

The symptoms of Novel Coronavirus – COVID-19 can range from mild illness to pneumonia. Some people will recover easily, and others may get very sick very quickly. People with Novel Coronavirus – COVID-19 may experience:

- fever
- flu-like symptoms such as coughing, sore throat and fatigue
- shortness of breath

Of course, **students who are unwell for any reason should not be sent to school.**

In addition, where students exhibit the symptoms mentioned above and they, or a family member with whom they have had close contact, has returned less than 14 days previously from a 'Higher' or 'Moderate' risk country they should be isolated and seek medical advice. The 'Higher' and 'Moderate' risk countries currently include:

- Mainland China
- Iran
- Italy
- Republic of Korea
- Cambodia
- Hong Kong
- Indonesia
- Japan
- Singapore
- Thailand

The School is continuing to monitor advice from the Commonwealth and State Governments. This advice is informing ongoing risk assessments being conducted in relation to School activities and operations, including whole school activities such as sporting carnivals, school fetes, other community gatherings and offsite activities such as camps and excursions.

4. Excursions, Camps and other School and Community Activities

The latest advice from the Australian Government, in a statement from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) issued on 8th March

(<https://health.govcms.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-coronavirus-covid-19-statement-on-8-march-2020>) indicates that:

“the risk to the general Australian population from COVID-19 is low, with the majority of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Australia in returned travellers.

*At this time the AHPPC consider that **public events should proceed**, but strongly recommend that people that are unwell with cough or fever or other respiratory symptoms should not attend public events or gatherings. This is particularly so for people who have recently travelled from overseas.*



People who have been a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19, or who returned from or transited through a listed higher risk country (www.health.gov.au/covid19-countries), must not attend public gatherings until 14 days after leaving the country or having contact with a confirmed case even if they are completely symptom free. Those undergoing COVID-19 testing also must not attend public gatherings until they have received their results.

*It is difficult to predict how the outbreak will evolve in Australia and the situation may change rapidly. When significant community transmission is occurring, social distancing measures such as cancellation of public gatherings will be considered. **Australia does not have evidence of significant transmission currently, therefore cancellation of public gatherings – at this time - would not be proportionate nor particularly effective.***

In response to a question from the media about school shut downs and cancellation of public gatherings on 10 March the Chief Medical Officer indicated that “we are not at that stage” (<https://health.govcms.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/doorstop-interview-about-coronavirus-covid-19-with-the-chief-medical-officer>). He went on to say that this is subject to ongoing review.

Emmaus Christian College is taking the same approach to excursions, camps, other whole school activities and community gatherings. These will, subject to a specific risk assessment for each event, be continuing unless there is guidance that indicates that these events should be reconsidered. In some cases, this may be in a modified form to take account of current concerns. Each of these activities is an important part of the educational program or broader life of the school community.

5. Potential School Closure

The Leadership of Emmaus Christian College is certainly praying that we will not be forced to close the school. Should this be requested by the relevant health authorities we would, however, obviously do so.

The school closures we have seen to date have been relatively brief, a matter of days. We also note that in the same interview on 10th March referred to above, the Chief Medical Officer talked of the potential for a reduction in the required isolation period based on developing overseas evidence.

At this stage, then, **if there is to be a closure of the School, we anticipate that it would not be prolonged.** Planning is well advanced to ensure that student learning, particularly of students in higher year levels, will incur the most minimal disruption possible.

6. Student Wellbeing

With the recent focus in the media of on the impact of this outbreak on schools we understand that some students will be experiencing heightened anxiety. The usual School pastoral care and wellbeing supports remain in place and can assist students as needed.



Emmaus
Christian College

As parents you also play a vital role in your children's wellbeing. We encourage you to talk to your children about any concerns they might have regarding this outbreak and how you as a family will respond.

We will continue to keep you updated if there are significant changes or new developments, but do encourage all parents and carers to remain personally informed themselves of the latest Government advice.

Blessings

Andrew Linke
Principal