

# COVID-19 update 17 March

Kia ora koutou katoa

**In the interest of keeping our community fully informed I am posting this latest information from the Ministry of Education. It is as follows:**

As had been anticipated, the Ministry of Health's Director-General this afternoon announced a **possible** case of COVID-19 in a school. The student, whose father was today confirmed as having tested positive, is currently in self-isolation and awaiting the results of a test. The test results are expected tomorrow.

If it is negative, the student will remain in self-isolation as they have been in close contact with their father.

If it is positive the plan will kick in. Health authorities will ask the school to close for 48 hours while close contacts are traced and put in self isolation for 14 days. Casual contacts will also be provided with information so that they know any symptoms to monitor for and where to go to if they become unwell. They do not need to self-isolate.

Close contacts of the father will also be in self-isolation.

As a precaution, the school is undertaking a careful clean of their school tonight, so that all surfaces in classrooms, door handles, bathroom surfaces etc. will have been cleaned in accordance with guidance from the Ministry of Health.

Health authorities have been very clear in their advice - while we wait for the result, there is no reason that children should not be going to school.

As you have been doing, please continue to focus on prevention of spread including through:

- Washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds and drying thoroughly - before and after eating as well as after attending the toilet
- Covering coughs and sneezes with clean tissues or with an elbow
- Putting used tissues in the bin

Staff and students need to stay home if they are unwell in any way.

## **Physical Distancing**

Yesterday we provided advice about considerations and possible approaches to school assemblies. Some people have asked why assemblies are different to classroom situations. The simple answer is that assemblies are not always core to providing education, and could be reduced or rearranged without impacting on learning.

Remember that personal hygiene, and reducing unnecessary physical contact (eg. hugs, handshakes, hongi) are still the most important things to do to stop the spread of any virus.

Please note that we are deliberately using the term “physical distancing” rather than “social distancing”. Maintaining social connection is as important as ever to people’s wellbeing during this time, if not more so. If you have students who are required to self-isolate, you could encourage their peers to maintain social contact with them through phone calls, email, pen-pal letters, class video calls, or age-appropriate social media.

### **Reminder - Who needs to self-isolate?**

The Government announcement at the weekend requires anyone who has arrived from overseas **after** 1am on Monday 16 March to self-isolate for 14 days, and to register with Healthline (0800 358 5453). The exception is people arriving from specified Pacific countries ([“Category 2” countries](#) as listed here), who do not need to self-isolate if they are not unwell.

People who arrived from overseas **before** 1am on Monday 16 March are not required to self-isolate, unless they have travelled from South Korea or Iran. Travellers from those countries need to self-isolate for 14 days from the date of their departure and register with Healthline.

People living in the same house as travellers that are required to self-isolate, need to minimise contact with them (avoiding being closer than 2 metres apart for more than 15 minutes). However, they are not required to self-isolate themselves.

### **Encouraging student attendance**

We know that some parents have concerns about their children attending school at the moment, some of which may be due to what they are seeing in the media about other countries.

There’s a simple rule here – if students are unwell (whether or not their illness relates to COVID-19) they should stay at home. Students who are not unwell should continue to attend school.

While we are seeing large-scale school shutdowns elsewhere in the world, in New Zealand we still have no community transmission. Consequently any decisions about school closures will be made on a case by case basis. In the meantime, unless students are unwell themselves, then parents should keep sending them to schools and early learning centres as these environments continue to be safe and the best place for them to continue their learning.