

Schools are safe, Sutton declares

INFECTION

Anna Prytz

The state's Chief Health Officer has reassured parents that schools remain a low risk for coronavirus transmission after a student tested positive, forcing 78 children and teachers across three campuses into quarantine just days after the resumption of face-to-face lessons.

Professor Brett Sutton confirmed yesterday that Keilor Downs College would temporarily close after a student tested positive for COVID-19.

The student was among seven new coronavirus cases in Victoria yesterday, bringing the state's total to 1634.

The teen attended a day of classes when Victorian schools began a staged return on Tuesday, including a VET class with six students from Taylors Lakes Secondary College and one student from St Albans Secondary College.

Those students, and other stu-

dents and teachers from Keilor Downs, are now isolating at home.

An Education Department spokesman said the Health Department had advised that neither Taylors Lakes Secondary College nor St Albans Secondary College needed to close.

Staff and students did not need to take any further action beyond existing precautions.

A teacher from Keilor Downs College tested positive to COVID-19 a week ago, but authorities believe the student's case is the result of a "family cluster" and there is no link to the previous case.

The Health Department said the teacher was not infectious when they last attended the school.

Professor Sutton said there had been "very few" cases associated with schools across Australia.

"The understanding of transmission in schools is it's really pretty rare," he said.

"We haven't seen transmission from students to teachers.

"If we've seen some cases it's usually been introduced by adults.

"The risk of transmission from that student to others is there, but I wouldn't expect significant numbers."

Professor Sutton told radio station 3AW that children and staff who came into contact with the student who tested positive have been quarantined for 14 days. They will only be tested if they show symptoms.

The number of students self-isolating could rise as contact tracing continued, he said.

Nathaniel Peacock, who is in year 12 at Keilor Downs College, said students had been told about the closure on Thursday night.

"I'm worried a little bit but we've been told by teachers to be assured that student-to-student contact is very rare so we're not too fussed," he told Channel Nine.

"In every classroom there's some hand sanitiser, some wipes.

"After every period we wipe down the tables and use hand sanitiser."

Professor Stephen Duckett, head of health economics at the Grattan Institute, said until coronavirus was eliminated there would be a small risk of cases in schools.

"The response is what is really important here; that it be identified quickly and the school closed down for a period of time to stop the spread further," he said.

Australian Principals Federation president Julie Podbury said schools were completely prepared for COVID 19-related closures.



Keilor Downs College: temporarily closed. Photo: Justin McManus