

School openings and COVID-19 research - 17 April 2020

Who has made statements about schools	What did they say about schools
<p>National Cabinet</p> <p>The National Cabinet comprises the Prime Minister and all State and Territory Premiers and Chief Ministers.</p> <p>The National Cabinet is supported by the Chief Medical Officers, who meet as the Australian Health Protection and Principles Committee (AHPPC). They pull together the modelling, research and data that form the basis of decisions made by the National Cabinet.</p>	<p>16 April 2020: National Cabinet agreed with the AHPPC health advice that “On current evidence, schools can be fully open”, advice that considered the “relatively low risk” of transmission in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Media Statement</p> <p>The National Cabinet has agreed on a set of national principles for schools to follow throughout the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic. The principles outline the importance of face-to-face learning in preference to remote learning, and include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our schools are critical to the delivery of high quality education for students and to give our children the best possible start in life. Our education systems are based on the recognition that education is best delivered by professional teachers to students in the classroom on a school campus. • Decisions regarding the response to COVID-19 in the schooling sector must continue to be informed by expert, official, national and state-based public health and education advice. • The health advice consistently provided by the AHPPC is that attendance at a school campus for education represents a very low health risk to students.

Scott Morrison - Prime Minister



16 April, 2020: Prime Minister Scott Morrison has consistently reiterated that it is safe for schools to remain open throughout the COVID-19 crisis. [SBS news](#)

15 April, 2020:

- The Prime Minister issues a direct plea to teachers to return to classroom: "Our nation is very grateful for the work that you're doing as our teachers, and we need you more than ever," he said. "Expert medical advice has not changed about the safety of children going to school... the risk remains very low...".
- The Prime Minister has never wavered in his insistence that the medical advice maintains it is safe for schools to remain open. (Political leaders in NSW and Victoria privately concede fears teachers would strike if they kept schools open were a major trigger for the decision to defy the medical advice that schools should remain open). The Prime Minister has stated that, while returning to a classroom may not be possible for all teachers, it was important students had a safe place to learn. Mr Morrison repeated health advice that the risk of COVID-19 spreading among school-aged children was very low. [ABC news](#), [news.com.au](#)

14 April 2020: In an [interview](#) with Chris Kenny, Mr Morrison said education remained a "high priority" for the government, signalling he would like to see students return to school.

15 March, 2020: "As the British Chief Medical Officer observed just over the last couple of days, the issue of wide-scale closure of schools, it might be anti-intuitive, but the advice is this could actually be a very negative thing in terms of impacting on how these curves operate...And so while it may seem counter-intuitive, there is very good reason why you would not be moving to broad scale closures of schools that could actually make the situation worse, not better. And so the states and territories are not moving in that direction." [Transcript - Press Conference](#)

Federal Department of Health's Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy



Federal Deputy Chief Medical Officer Nick Coatsworth



15 April, 2020: There is no evidence kids are super spreaders of virus. Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr Nick Coatsworth said investigations of child-to-child or teacher-to-child transmission of COVID19 in schools in NSW and South Australia showed young students had not spread the virus in the way older people had. [Herald Sun](#)

- Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy has blamed parents and teachers for effectively shutting down Australia's schools. "Most of the State governments actually didn't want to close the schools. It was the parents and the teachers who closed the schools," he told a New Zealand parliamentary hearing on Tuesday. [AAP](#)

14 April, 2020: The official advice from Australia's Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy has not changed, with the national cabinet reassured that schools are safe to remain open. Professor Murphy has presented the same position almost daily for weeks now, namely that there is not good evidence to support the closure of schools. This was reiterated by Dr Nick Coatsworth, who said that the spread of the virus to children posed little risk and reiterated in [The Australian Editorial](#), 14 April, 2020

23 March, 2020: All of the international data shows that it's very, very uncommon for children to get symptomatic disease... We have not seen evidence of major transmission amongst schools in children... the risks of children not going to school were greater than the risks of them staying in school. [March 23, 2020](#)

18 March, 2020: "This is quite different to influenza and other respiratory diseases which have quite severe disease sometimes in children. We know that even in influenza, school closures are a controversial issue. We believe very strongly that it's in the best interest of our children and the nation at this time to keep schools open. There may be occasions when there's a big outbreak in a community that some local school closures might be necessary. But at this time, across the community, our view is that schools should stay open... It's interesting in China that again, most of the children infected were reported as having picked up the virus from adults in their household." [18 March 2020](#)

Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC)

Key decision-making committee for health emergencies. It comprises all state and territory Chief Health Officers and is chaired by the Australian Chief Medical Officer.



Australian Government
Department of Health



Australian Government
Department of Education,
Skills and Employment

16 April, 2020: The AHPPC advice remains that there is a relatively low risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools and that certain measures, such as cancelling school assemblies and maintaining personal hygiene rules, should be enacted. [Advice on reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools](#)

30 March, 2020: The AHPPC does not recommend schools be shut at this time. [Australian Government - Department of Education, Skills and Employment](#)

18 March, 2020: Broadly, the health evidence on school closures from previous respiratory epidemics shows the costs are often underestimated and the benefits are overestimated. This may be even more so in relation to COVID-19 as, unlike influenza, the impact on otherwise healthy children has been minimal to date. [AHPPC statement](#)

17 March, 2020: The AHPPC met to consider the issue of school closures in relation to the community transmission of COVID 19. The Committee's advice is that pre-emptive closures are not proportionate or effective. [17 March statement](#)

**Victoria's Chief Health
Officer, Professor Brett
Sutton**



15 April 2020: Despite his earlier declarations, cited below, Dr Sutton is now promoting the position that schools should be closed to aid the campaign against community transmission. Dr Sutton does not provide any evidence or studies to support his changed advice that schools should teach remotely for term two to stop the spread of the virus. Sutton's updated position coincides and conflicts with schools opening in other parts of the world. [AFR article 15 April 2020](#) and Vic Chief Health Officer [official Twitter](#)

16 March, 2020:

- Sutton stated that there is currently limited information on the contribution of children to transmission of COVID-19. The WHO-China Joint Mission noted the primary role of household transmission and observed that children tended to be infected from adults [with whom they lived].
- "Pre-emptive school closures are not likely to be effective or proportionate as a public health intervention to prevent community transmission" a position adopted and promoted by Victoria's Premier Daniel Andrews in his earlier statements. [Statement on school closures](#)

Independent Infectious Disease Experts



April 13, 2020 [news.com.au](https://www.news.com.au)

- Australian National University infectious disease expert Professor Peter Collignon told news.com.au that teachers faced a greater COVID-19 risk from a supermarket than classrooms and urged teachers to return to classrooms.
- “The other example to look at is (South) Korea, which is the most similar to us. They have kept their schools open.”
- Monash University Professor Allen Cheng said he believed it was safe for school to reopen.

April 15, 2020 [The Age](https://www.theage.com.au)

- University of Melbourne epidemiologist Professor Tony Blakely said schools could still be reopened under a strategy of suppression or "Squashing the curve" – maintaining a low rate of COVID-19 infection until a vaccine became available – as children tended to have only a mild version of the illness and "They also don't transmit it very well".
- Deputy Chief Medical Officer Dr Coatsworth:
 - "It quite clearly affects a lower proportion of children."
 - It remains the view of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee that schools are safe places because of the low rates of transmission

16 March, 2020: Why Australia is not shutting schools to help control the spread of coronavirus. Medical officers have not recommended mass closures amid dissenting views on whether – and when – it will be necessary. A report from epidemiologists and public health experts to the health department said closing schools would only reduce the overall attack rate effectively if school children were found to have a much higher risk of infection than adults. Based on current available evidence, children are not at higher risk than adults. [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com)

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Considerations for School Closure:

Available modelling data indicate that early, short to medium closures do not impact the epi curve of COVID-19 or available health care measures (e.g., hospitalizations). There may be some impact of much longer closures (8 weeks, 20 weeks) further into community spread, but that modelling also shows that other mitigation efforts (e.g., handwashing, home isolation) have more impact on both spread of disease and health care measures. In other countries, those places who closed school (e.g. Hong Kong) have not had more success in reducing spread than those that did not (e.g. Singapore).

[CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

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School closure has limited effectiveness in controlling Covid-19 transmission as detailed in a systematic review -

- Policy makers need to be aware of the equivocal evidence when considering school closures for COVID-19, and that combinations of social distancing measures should be considered.
- The health evidence on school closures from previous respiratory epidemics shows the costs are often underestimated and the benefits are overestimated

[Reported in the Guardian](#), [BBC](#) and [SMH](#)

Viner, R. M., Russell, S. J., Croker, H., Packer, J., Ward, J., Stansfield, C., ... Booy, R. (2020). School closure and management practices during coronavirus outbreaks including COVID-19: a rapid systematic review. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642\(20\)30095-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2352-4642(20)30095-x)



Government of South Australia
Department for Education



SA Health



SA Premier Steven Marshall



**SA Chief Public Health
Officer Associate Professor
Nicola Spurrier**

“In South Australia, the advice from our Chief Public Health Officer is that schools, preschools and early childhood services should remain open.” [SA Department of Education](#), Accessed April 17, 2020

16 March, 2020: South Australian premier, Steven Marshall, said there was no point extending school holidays for a couple of weeks. “This is not a political decision, it is not an ideological decision, it is an evidence-based decision, which has been informed by the brightest minds in Australia, and they’re making it very clear,” he said. “Children should go to school and to preschool and to kindy, here in South Australia, and around the country, and not to do so doesn’t diminish the risk – in fact, it increases the risk and it reduces our response as a nation to the coronavirus. It will harm our ability to tackle the coronavirus. So this couldn’t be any clearer. The advice was unequivocal.” ([The Guardian](#))

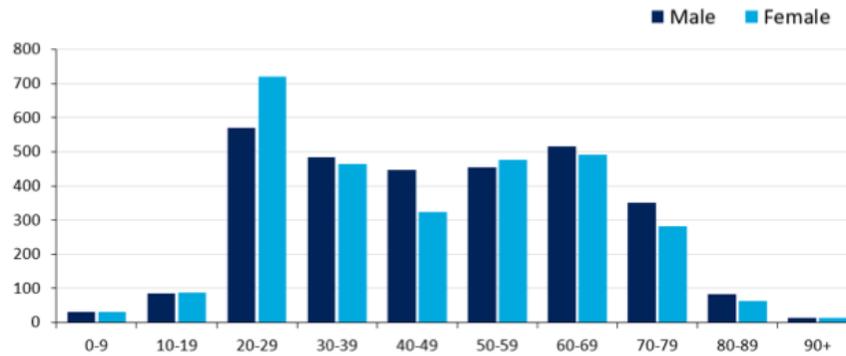
Case fatality rate of COVID-19 by age

- Current data across countries suggests that the elderly are most at risk
- For many infectious diseases young children are most at risk. For COVID-19 cases the opposite seems to be true.
- Cases of COVID-19 were reported across all ages.
- The median age of all cases is 47 years (range: 0 to 100 years).
- The median age of deaths is 79 years (range: 55 to 94 years).

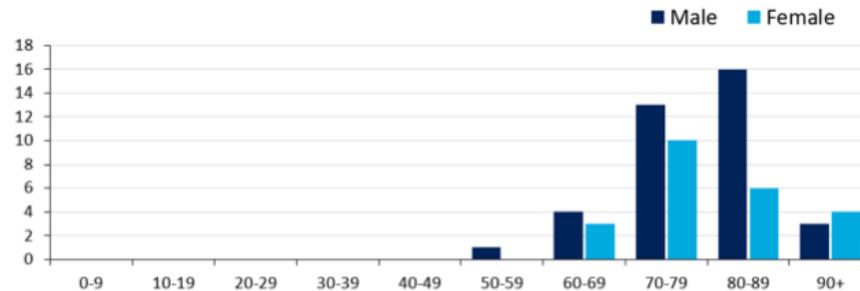


Australian Government
Department of Health

CASES BY AGE GROUP AND SEX



DEATHS BY AGE GROUP AND SEX



Taken from infographic on COVID-19 in Australia [updated 14 April 2020 by Australian Government Department of Health](#)



People of all ages can be infected by the new coronavirus (nCoV-2019). Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus. WHO advise people of all age to take steps to protect themselves from the virus, for example by following good hand hygiene and good respiratory hygiene.

Does the new coronavirus affect older people, or are younger people also susceptible?

#Coronavirus

**Federal Education Minister
Dan Tehan**



15 April, 2020: Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan told parents this morning they should not “feel guilty about sending your children to school”. Mr Tehan states that “We don’t want them missing out on an education as we deal with this pandemic.” [Herald Sun](#)

9 April, 2020: Tehan gave a binding legal directive for independent schools to reopen in Term 2 and provide learning in classrooms for children who need supervision during the COVID-19 crisis.

23 March, 2020: Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan said he and his state and territory counterparts did not want children to lose a year's education as a result of the pandemic, if they could avoid it.

"We want our children to continue to get an education for as long as they possibly can during this COVID-19 outbreak," he told the ABC. [Canberra Times](#)

<p>Victoria's Premier Daniel Andrews</p> 	<p>The Premier's position has fluctuated.</p> <p>As of April 15, 2020, Premier's statements have included:</p> <p>"Schools must be open. Parents that need to send their children to school to learn at school for any reason ... they have that right to send their child to their local state school to get an education."</p> <p>And</p> <p>"Stay at home, learn at home."</p> <p>The Premier has continued make statements that would appear to be in opposition to the Prime Minister while at the same time rejecting claims his directives were at odds with the federal government.</p> <p>So, while the Prime Minister suggests that it is important that "children are able to keep physically going to school" Premier Andrews continues to suggest that "There is no difference in our approach. I think the federal education minister has made it abundantly clear that our settings are absolutely consistent with what every government in the country wants to see."</p> <p>Herald Sun</p>
<p>Taiwan</p>  <p>Vice-President Chen Chien-jen, also a highly regarded epidemiologist</p>	<p>13 March, 2020: Taiwan would have to be considered the world's success story in the fight against COVID-19. Taiwan has kept its school open, albeit with strict rules banning attendance for all students exhibiting flu-like symptoms and with enhanced discipline concerning meals and the imposition of temperature checks. Michelle Yun writes for The Guardian that "In Taiwan, most residents carry on as normal, with offices and schools open. Many restaurants, gyms, and cafes in the capital, Taipei, are still bustling, although most premises will take temperatures and spray hands with sanitiser before allowing customers in." Life and schooling continue as normal, albeit with the addition of an extra dose of hygiene. The Guardian</p>