

## Schools update for coronavirus

February 21, 2020

Federation is aware of community concerns about the confirmation of novel coronavirus cases in NSW but has confidence in the guidelines and procedures for managing the situation set out by Australian governments and the health authorities.

President Angelo Gavrielatos said members should be aware of misinformation being circulated about the coronavirus and only heed official advice.

“The role a teacher can play in situations such as these is to stay informed, remain calm and be in a position to pass the correct information on to their students, parents, colleagues and the community,” Mr Gavrielatos said.



### Advice from health and education authorities

On 31 January, the NSW Government requested that children who had visited China in the past two weeks not attend school or childcare services until 14 days lapsed from their date of departure from China, in line with federal Health Department advice.

Health Minister Brad Hazzard and Education Minister Mitchell said that despite the low risk, the Government issued the advice as a precautionary measure.

“I’ve been advised that it’s not medically necessary, but the NSW Government has acted in line with community expectations to ensure the safest possible environment for our students,” Mr Hazzard said.

Federal Health Department advice issued 1 February states: “If a child or staff member has been in close contact with a confirmed case of novel coronavirus, they must isolate themselves in their homes for 14 days after last contact with the confirmed case.

“Staff and students in these circumstances are not to attend schools or early childhood centres and should not engage with other students.”

Fourteen days is the internationally recognised incubation period for the coronavirus.

Under the section “What if I have a student or staff member who is sick within 14 days of being in mainland China?”, the department advises:

“If the student/staff member develops mild symptoms:

- isolate the student/staff member in a single room away from others
- inform the parent/guardian or staff member and advise them to arrange an urgent medical review

- when possible, the student/staff member should be isolated at home while waiting for a medical assessment; and
- the parent/guardian or staff member should phone ahead to the GP or hospital and inform them that the student/staff member may have novel coronavirus.
- If the student/staff member has severe symptoms, such as shortness of breath:
  - call 000 and request an ambulance
  - if they are a student, inform their parent(s) or guardian(s) and
  - inform the paramedics that the student/staff may have novel coronavirus infection.

For federal Department of Health information for schools and early childhood education and care services go to [education.gov.au/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov](https://www.education.gov.au/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov).

Schools should continue to follow the NSW Education Department's Infection Control guidelines, available at [education.nsw.gov.au/inside-the-department/health-and-safety/risk-management/infection-control](https://www.education.nsw.gov.au/inside-the-department/health-and-safety/risk-management/infection-control).

For any questions you may have or reports of staff or students affected to call the Department's Incident Report and Support Hotline on 1800 811 523.

NSW Health has information available on its website.

Factsheet: [health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/coronavirus.aspx](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/coronavirus.aspx)

FAQs: [health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/coronavirus-faqs.aspx](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/coronavirus-faqs.aspx)

### **Department acts on Federation's requests**

Following representations to Federation by various school communities affected in relation to absent students, the union undertook discussions with the Department to extend the census date (for determining staffing numbers) to minimise instability in affected schools, which was agreed.

Also, aware of evidence from members about the effect of racism and actions of some students and community members with regard to students, the union encouraged the Department to issue further explicit advice to schools about their critical role and responsibilities regarding anti-racism in schools. The Department's Deputy Secretary, School Operations Murat Dizdar issued an email to principals advising: "In the wake of the novel coronavirus outbreak, some students, teachers, parents and members of school communities who are of Chinese and other Asian backgrounds could be particularly vulnerable to incidents of prejudice given the link between the initial virus emergence and China."

Mr Gavrielatos said: "Federation supports the values of the Department's Anti-Racism Policy and strongly advocates for the elimination of racism through the education of teachers, students and parents."

Principals are required to nominate an Anti-Racism Contact Officer as per the Department's Anti-racism Education Policy. The Department is currently undertaking a survey of its Anti-Racism Contact Officers (ARCO), and the training provided link [https://utsau.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cj0svaOYDf8501](https://utsau.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cj0svaOYDf8501) which Federation encourages ARCOs to complete.

Federation also refers members to the union's [anti-racism resources](#), where professional readings, policies, strategies and resources can be found.