

6 March 2020



Dear Sancta Maria College Families

Re: Novel Coronavirus Update

I wish to inform our families that there are NO suspected or confirmed staff or student cases of COVID-19 at Sancta Maria College. Rumours can be damaging. Please be assured that families would receive an update from the College if the situation changes. Students must continue coming to school.

Since late January this year, SMC along with other education providers in the sector, have been responding to novel coronavirus, now known as COVID-19. My communications earlier in the year have kept you informed of the school's position for students returning to our school from the areas most affected.

In recent days we have been informed that there are a few confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand and we are also receiving commentary on social and other media of a growing number of other cases (some of which are not confirmed) in Auckland. This raises levels of anxiety amongst those in a school's community. Please explain to your children that it is unhelpful to post any information on social media regarding any information relating to suspected or confirmed cases.

All students at the start of the school year who had visited China in the holiday period have completed their self-isolation. For the small number of returning students who are still in Category 1 (see below), school work has been made available to them online. Students returning in the future are governed by the border measures now in place.

As you are aware, border measures remain in place that will deny entry to New Zealand for any person who has travelled from a country or area of concern, or who is a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19, and if presented with clinically compatible symptoms, is being considered as a suspect case and testing is performed.

People who travel to New Zealand from or via (excluding airport transit) those countries listed in **Category 1 (Mainland China, Iran, Northern Italy and the Republic of Korea)** should self-isolate for 14 days following departure from the **Category 1** country and register with Healthline Phone 0800 358 5453.

People who travel to New Zealand from or via (excluding airport transit) those countries listed in **Category 2 (Hong Kong, Italy (other than northern Italy), Japan, Singapore and Thailand)** should be aware of COVID-19 symptoms. They do not have to self-isolate if well. They should self-isolate if they develop any symptoms of concern and ring Healthline (0800 358 5453) if they develop symptoms within 14 days of departing the Category 2 country.

SMC has a Pandemic Management Plan in place to protect staff, students and, if possible, ensure continuity of education services. The college takes its direction from the Ministry of Education who receive direction from the Ministry of Health.

SMC remains vigilant and proactive to help support the wellbeing of our staff and students. Staff and students have received information and been made aware of some sensible steps to adopt to minimise any risk. Some of the actions taken by our school include:

- Hand sanitiser in every classroom and public areas (reception, school canteen and technical areas)
- Tissues are in every classroom
- Soap dispensers are kept full and can be found in the toilets/bathrooms and other areas in the school
- Cleaning service clean classrooms and offices every afternoon following the end of the school day
- Information and education on safe hygiene practices has been shared
- Posters from the Ministry of Health have been displayed in identified areas explaining how to protect others from becoming sick, safe hand washing practices and how to stop the spread of germs
- Local domestic student register of students volunteering to stand-down from school for the 14 day period following travel to areas affected by the Coronavirus is maintained and students monitored
- The Health Centre has been stocked with pandemic kits of masks and gloves, some disposable gowns and protective eyewear
- Identification, monitoring and liaison with International Department of any students presenting with concerns from recent travel with signs/symptoms of high temperature or flu-like symptoms, which may be a precursor to the Coronavirus
- The school community has received updates
- The School Nurse who has oversight of the Health Centre is remaining in contact with other health professionals, monitoring any changes or notifications that may affect the running of the school or day-to-day practices
- The Principal is receiving regular updates from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and acting accordingly
- The SMC Board of Trustees has been kept informed
- Open conversations are being held as and when required with staff, parents and students.

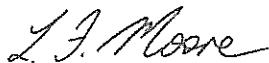
To minimise any risk, we recommend these common-sense steps as you would with a flu-virus:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Wash hands frequently, especially after contact with ill people or their environment
- People with symptoms of acute respiratory illness infection should practice cough etiquette: maintain distance, cover the mouth, and cover coughs or sneezes with disposable cloths or clothing.
- Remain at home if unwell.

Please find attached a communication from the Public Health Service for parents that also set out contact details should you require this.

Thank you again for your support and co-operation. SMC students are expected to be attending school as usual, sitting any scheduled tests and assessments and you would be advised if usual school routines are changed.

Ngā mihi nui and with Blessings



Louise Moore
Principal



Auckland Regional Public Health Service – 04 March 2020

Schools Resource

COVID-19 Information for parents

What you need to know

While a parent of secondary school students has been confirmed as the second COVID-19 case in Auckland, please be assured there has been no exposure from this case at these schools or any other schools.

There will be concern in school and wider communities, and misinformation circulating through social media. Here are the facts:

- The students did not travel with their parents.
- The students have been to school since their parents returned, but they were not infectious. They did not have, and do not have, any symptoms.
- All of the family is in isolation, but the students are well and are at home as a precaution.

Credible, evidence-based information about COVID-19 can be found at the following places:

- The [Ministry of Health COVID-19 webpage](#).
- The [Auckland Regional Public Health Service COVID-19 webpage](#).
- The [World Health Organization's COVID-19 site](#).

Anyone seeking health-related advice about COVID-19 can also free call Healthline's dedicated 0800 number: **0800 358 5453**.

Frequently asked questions

What is Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

A novel coronavirus is a new strain of coronavirus that hasn't previously been identified in humans. In January 2020 officials identified a new coronavirus, COVID-19.

How worried should I be?

The current chances of catching COVID-19 in New Zealand are low. There are currently only two confirmed cases in the country and the risk of an ongoing outbreak is considered low-to-moderate. For most people, the virus causes only mild symptoms – the international evidence suggests this is especially the case in children and young people. You are at greatest risk of infection if you have had face-to-face contact (closer than one metre for longer than 15 minutes) with someone confirmed as having COVID-19.

Should I still be sending my children to school?

Yes, children should continue to attend school as normal. This would only change if:

- A student or staff member at your school was confirmed as having COVID-19, **and**
- Your child had had 'close contact' with the infected person.*

Close contact means being face-to-face (less than a metre) with an infected person for longer than 15 minutes. Contacts of close contacts are **not considered at risk of catching the virus.*

What can I do to protect my child at school?

As with other respiratory illnesses, it's important you remind your child/ren to practice safe hand, cough and sneeze hygiene to reduce the risk of infection. They should:

- Frequently and thoroughly wash (with soap and water for at least 20-30 seconds) and dry hands. A video on how best to do this is available [here](#). "Nanogirl" Dr Michelle Dickinson has also made an [excellent video](#), aimed at children, showing why hand washing is so important to get rid of viruses.
- Practice good cough and sneeze hygiene. That means:
 - Maintaining a distance of a metre or more away from other people.
 - Coughing or sneezing into their elbow or a disposable tissue, then putting used tissues in the bin and washing their hands afterwards.
- Carry disposable tissues in their bags/pockets. Hand sanitiser is also a useful alternative option if soap and water is not readily available.
- Avoid touching their faces. Viruses can enter the body through the eyes, nose and mouth.

Information about hand, cough and sneeze hygiene is available on the [Ministry of Health](#), [World Health Organization](#) and [Auckland Regional Public Health Service websites](#).

Is it safe for my child to attend school activities like assemblies and camps?

Yes, students can continue attending these activities as normal. This would only change if:

- A student or staff member at your school was confirmed as having COVID-19, **AND**
- Your child had had 'close contact' with the infected person.*

When attending these activities, your child should continue to practice good hand, cough and sneeze hygiene, as described above.

**Close contact means being face-to-face (less than a metre) with an infected person for longer than 15 minutes. Contacts of close contacts are not considered at risk of catching the virus.*

Can my child safely continue to catch public transport with others to school?

Yes, students can continue using their usual transport method to get to school. They should simply continue practising good respiratory and hand hygiene, as described above.

Should my child wear a mask to school?

For most people, face masks are not recommended, as there is limited evidence that they prevent transmission of disease. Good respiratory and hand hygiene is more important. The World Health Organization's (WHO's) advice on face masks can be found [here](#), and they have produced [videos on when and how to use masks](#).

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

COVID-19 symptoms are similar to a range of other respiratory illnesses such as influenza ('flu) and do not necessarily mean that you have COVID-19. Symptoms can include fever, coughing and difficulty breathing. Difficulty breathing is a sign of possible pneumonia and requires immediate medical attention.

How is COVID-19 spread?

The scientific evidence confirms that coronavirus is spread by droplets. This means that when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, they may generate droplets containing the virus. These droplets are too large to stay in the air for long, so they quickly settle on surrounding surfaces. Droplet-spread diseases can be spread by:

- coughing and sneezing
- close personal contact
- contact with an object or surface with viral particles on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

That's why it's really important to practice good hygiene, regularly wash and thoroughly dry hands and practice good cough and sneeze etiquette.

How long does it take to develop symptoms of COVID-19 after being exposed?

It is still unknown how long it takes for a person to develop symptoms after being exposed to someone with the virus. Based on the characteristics of other coronaviruses, it is likely to be between two and 14 days.

More credible, evidence-based information about COVID-19 can be found at the following places:

- The [Ministry of Health COVID-19 webpage](#).
- The [Auckland Regional Public Health Service COVID-19 webpage](#).
- The [World Health Organization's COVID-19 site](#).