

School Excursions to the Australian Capital Territory

COVID-19 Protocols

Teachers Checklist

Version: 3

Date: 25 January 2021

Background to the School Excursion Protocols

Following advice from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Chief Health Officer on how schools should operate in 2021, the National Capital Educational Tourism Project (NCETP) commissioned advice from [Aspen Medical](#) on how schools can travel safely to Canberra.

The NCETP has published [\[School Excursion COVID-19 Protocols\]](#) addressing school excursions (from departure to return, including travel, accommodation, and visits to attractions), in line with ACT COVID-19 regulations.

The NCETP has developed [\[Checklists\]](#) to aid different industry sectors to follow the COVID-19 Protocols, however one of the key aspects all industry sectors should be apprised of is the importance of cohorts.

School Children as a Cohort

Maintaining separate cohorts during travel and excursion activities mitigates the risk of COVID-19 transmission into the broader community.

A cohort is defined as a group of people with shared characteristics (e.g. a school class, a year level) that has been established within a school environment.

A cohort should move as 1 unit while maintaining physical separation and distance from other cohort groups or members of the public.

Movement of a cohort during an excursion could, for instance, take the form of:

1. 2 x classes (~ 50 children) plus adults who already share a common space within the school environment.
2. They are transported as 1 cohort by bus to a community venue where they are not required to maintain 1.5 metre physical distancing within their established cohort, but are required to practice physical distancing from other cohort groups (e.g. another school group) and members of the public.
3. During this time, a high level of personal hygiene, including hand hygiene and cough etiquette, should be maintained.
4. Precautionary measures such as designated toilets and eating areas should be considered to ensure this cohort does not mix with other similar cohort groups at a venue.
5. The return journey should consist of the original cohort of children and adults on board the same bus with the same driver used to transport the group to the venue.

Hygiene Practice

1. School children do not need to follow strict adult physical distancing guidelines, but should follow good hygiene practices including:
 - Regularly washing hands and using hand sanitiser.
 - Not sharing drinks or food.
 - Coughing or sneezing into the crook of an elbow, or a tissue which is immediately discarded.
 - Monitoring of symptoms and isolating children with fever, cough, sore throat, or lethargy.

Teachers Checklist

Schools must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan specific to their operations.

2. School Children as a Cohort

- 2.1. Maintain separate cohorts during travel and excursion activities to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission into the broader community.
- 2.1.1. A cohort is defined as a group of people with shared characteristics (e.g. a school class, a year level) that has been established within the school environment.
- 2.2. A cohort should move as 1 unit while maintaining physical separation and distance from other cohort groups or members of the public.
- 2.3. An example of movement of a cohort group during an excursion may include:
 - 2.3.1.1. A cohort of 2 x Grade 5 classes (50 children) including adults (educators) who are already sharing a common space within the school environment.
 - 2.3.1.2. They are transported as 1 cohort by bus to a community venue where they are not required to maintain 1.5 metre physical distancing within their established cohort, but are required to practice physical distancing from other cohort groups (e.g. another school group) and members of the public.
 - 2.3.1.3. During this time, a high level of personal hygiene, including hand hygiene and cough etiquette, should be maintained.
 - 2.3.1.4. Precautionary measures such as designated toilets and eating areas should be considered to ensure this cohort does not mix with other similar cohort groups at a venue.
 - 2.3.1.5. The return journey should consist of the original cohort of 50 children and adults on board the same bus with the same driver used to transport the group to the venue.

3. Pre-Excursion

- 3.1. At the initial gathering / attendance recording of a cohort (during handover of a child from a Parent/Guardian/Carer to a Teacher in charge of an excursion), before each child joins the cohort, observation of the general wellbeing of the child should be undertaken by a Teacher, prior to the Parent/Guardian/Carer leaving the facility.
- 3.2. Teachers must obtain a Personal Health Declaration (PHD) from a child's Parent/Guardian/Carer prior to a child attending the excursion.
- 3.3. All PHDs must be collected and managed by in accordance with privacy requirements.
- 3.4. If a child is displaying symptoms such as a fever, cough, sore throat, or lethargy, and appears generally unwell, the child should not take part in the excursion but should return home with their Parent/Guardian/Carer and the child's Parent/Guardian/Carer should seek medical advice immediately.
- 3.5. If a Teacher or a child is a suspected COVID-19 case prior to an excursion they should be excluded from the cohort and isolated.
 - 3.5.1. The Parent/Guardian/Carer of a child must be contacted immediately.
 - 3.5.2. The excursion should not go ahead.
- 3.6. The PHD requires the Parent/Guardian/Carer of a child to declare if they are coming from an area deemed a hotspot by the State/Territory in which they reside.
 - 3.6.1. If a child has come from an area deemed a hotspot their school must assess whether the child should attend the excursion.
- 3.7. Where there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in a school environment Teachers should contact the National Coronavirus Helpline (1800 020 080 – operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) for further advice, then contact the NCETP.
- 3.8. Teachers should not conduct COVID-19 testing themselves.

4. Bus Travel

- 4.1. Maintain adult–adult and adult–child physical distancing for all adults accompanying a cohort of children during transportation.¹
- 4.2. Adults accompanying children should maintain 1.5 metre physical distancing from other adults.
 - 4.2.1. An example of physical distancing may include:
 - 4.2.1.1. 2 adults sit on 2 sides at the front of the bus.
 - 4.2.1.2. 2 adults sit on 2 sides at the back of the bus.
- 4.3. If adults are unable to physically distance during transportation the wearing of face masks should be adhered to, as recommended by CDC guidelines.²
- 4.4. Movement of students boarding and disembarking a bus should be orderly and controlled by supervising adults if separate entry and exit doors are not available.
 - 4.4.1. An example of this is disembarking 1 row of seating at a time to eliminate bottlenecks of students at a bus door.

¹ Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public: World Health Organisation; 2020 [Available from: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

² CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>

5. Air Travel

Departure Terminal

- 5.1. School groups should use a separate group check-in area where possible.
- 5.2. Physical distancing of the cohort from members of the public should be maintained while traversing through airport terminals.
- 5.3. The cohort should remain in 1 area once they arrive at the boarding gate, if possible.
- 5.4. Supervising adults should carry hand sanitiser and encouraged regular hand hygiene for the cohort while waiting to board.
- 5.5. If toilet facilities are used strict hand hygiene should be employed, with hand sanitiser applied to children on their return to the cohort.
- 5.6. Visitation to airport shops should be discouraged.
- 5.7. Purchase of food/drink items should be discouraged while waiting to board.
- 5.8. Strict hand hygiene measures should be applied if items from airport shops or food/drinks are purchased.
- 5.9. At all times the cohort should adhere to strict hand hygiene, cough etiquette and physical distancing from members of the public.

On-board/In-flight

- 5.10. Physical distancing of the cohort from members of the public should be encouraged during the boarding process.
- 5.11. The cohort should board the plane as 1 unit.
- 5.12. The cohort should be seated together in 1 area, separated from other groups or members of the public by at least 1 row of seats, if feasible.
- 5.13. Adults travelling with the cohort should maintain physical distancing from other adults where possible.
- 5.14. If adults are unable to physical distance while onboard the plane the wearing of face masks should be adhered to.
- 5.15. Regular hand sanitisation in-flight is highly recommended.
- 5.16. Supervising adults who are part of the cohort should carry hand sanitiser and promote regular use to members of the cohort.
- 5.17. At all times the cohort should adhere to strict hand hygiene, cough etiquette and physical distancing from members of the public.

Disembarking

- 5.18. The cohort should disembark from the aircraft as 1 unit, maintaining physical distancing from aircraft crew and other members of the public where possible.
- 5.19. The cohort should remain seated until the aircraft is clear of other passengers, to reduce the chances of bottlenecking while disembarking.
- 5.20. After disembarking the cohort should use hand sanitiser before traversing to the baggage claim area.
- 5.21. The cohort should remain together as 1 unit, maintaining physical distancing from members of the public while waiting to claim baggage.
- 5.22. Once baggage has been claimed the cohort should traverse as 1 unit to waiting transport, maintaining physical distancing from members of the public.
- 5.23. Before boarding a bus supervising adults should conduct a wellness check of all members of the cohort.
- 5.24. Hand hygiene should be performed before boarding.

Management of Suspected & Confirmed Cases on Excursions

1. Schools are encouraged to develop their own management plan for a sick child or positive case, in line with state health department guide.
2. If a Teacher or a child becomes a suspected COVID-19 case during a school excursion, or is experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (fever, cough, sore throat or lethargy) they should be isolated in an appropriate space under the supervision of 1 Teacher.
 - Standard precautions should be adopted when providing care / first aid to a person suspected of having COVID-19.
 - Gloves, masks and, if available, a protective gown or apron should be used, including when dealing with blood or body fluids/substances.
 - Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) used should be double bagged and disposed of.
 - Wash hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser before and after providing care / first aid.
3. Teachers should contact the Australian Capital Territory Public Health Unit (ACT PHU) and the National Coronavirus Helpline (1800 020 080 – operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) for advice and comply with all directives given by the ACT PHU, then contact the NCETP.³
4. All children in their cohort should be tested for COVID-19 and remain quarantined at the accommodation where they are staying until results are known.
5. Teachers should not conduct COVID-19 testing themselves.
6. If tests are positive the ACT PHU will advise on quarantine options.
 - Teachers will remain with their cohort and maintain duty of care in contact with Parents/Guardians/Carers.
 - Teachers should create a list of potential close contacts.
 - A Parent/Guardian/Carer will be able to come to Canberra and isolate with their child.
7. All venues visited will be notified, under the direction of the ACT PHU , and with the support of the NCETP.
8. Schools returning home must contact their state health department before travel and heed advice provided to them.
9. If a cohort has travelled by bus it may return home by bus (if the destination can be reached without stopping), and then isolate for 14 days.
10. Coach drivers will be encouraged to wear PPE and must isolate on return.
11. Schools that have used mixed transport must liaise with the ACT PHU to quarantine in Canberra.
12. A deep clean of the cohort's accommodation must occur, under the supervision of the ACT PHU.
13. Where tests are negative a cohort can resume its excursion itinerary.
14. A child with symptoms should remain separate to avoid passing on illnesses, and should be collected by a Parent/Guardian/Carer as soon as possible.

³ AHPPC <https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-advice-on-reducing-the-potential-risk-of-covid-19-transmission-in-schools>