



COVID-19 condition on approval

What is the condition?

On 9 April 2020, the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, placed a condition on all non-government independent approved authorities requiring that their schools maintain an on-campus learning option for students. This is to ensure that students that are unable to learn at home have an option to physically attend school. This might include children of essential workers, vulnerable students or students that do not have a safe learning environment at home.

The Minister for Education has exercised the power under section 81(1)(c) of the Act to impose the following condition on all approved authorities of independent non-government schools.

The approved authority must, from the published commencement of Term 2, not stand down the delivery of education at a school solely in response to COVID19 related concerns unless doing so is compliant with the advice, instructions or direction of the health or education authorities of the Commonwealth or the State or Territory in which the school is located, and the approved authority has acted genuinely and in good faith in discharge of its duties of care to students, employees and others.

The act of standing down includes, but is not limited to:

- *not delivering or providing school education at a location of a school for which the approved authority is approved under the Australian Education Act 2013.*
- *altering school holidays unless otherwise approved or authorised by law.*

What does this condition mean?

The condition states that all non-government independent approved authorities must continue to provide an option for parents who need to send their children to school from the commencement of Term 2, 2020.

This might include children of essential front line workers who, in the absence of a classroom option, are forced to make the decision to stop working in our essential services.

What does not delivering or providing school education at a location mean?

Each independent non-government school in Australia is approved, as part of their registration, to deliver education at a certain location. For many schools this would just be the one location which students go to each day. Some schools operate multiple campuses, in which case each campus would be an approved location.

The condition requires the school to ensure that, for each location it is approved, there is a physical learning environment available for students to continue their education.

There is no expectation that you will deliver separate, classroom based education delivery alongside any content that is being provided online.

Schools might choose to deliver online learning in the physical school environment. This is fine as it meets the intent to ensure that all students have a safe place to undertake their learning.

What does altering school holidays “unless authorised” mean?

Commonwealth legislation does not prescribe when school holidays should occur for non-government schools in each jurisdiction. Non-government schools have flexibility to make decisions based on their individual circumstances and subject to any legislation that may apply in their state and territory.

The Australian Government respects this flexibility, however if a school chooses to invoke extended school holidays with an intention to circumvent this condition, this would be looked at closely to determine whether the school is considered compliant.

Who decides if a school should close or remain open?

Decisions to close schools are a matter for the relevant education authorities. This includes:

- State and Territory governments for government schools
- school systems where relevant, and
- individual independent schools.

Schools are encouraged to contact their respective State and Territory education authority regarding:

- all proposed closures
- staff and students in self-isolation
- any changes to operating practices arising from their response to COVID-19.

Schools are to follow the best medical advice available in their respective jurisdiction, and any decisions made in respect of COVID-19 should consider the specific circumstances of the particular school.

Why do parents need to send their children to school during a pandemic?

Current health advice is consistent and clear that schools can remain open and students are at low risk from COVID-19.

If schools remove all on campus options, then many parents will need to stay home to supervise children, meaning they are removed from doing critical jobs to support the country during a national emergency.

These could be nurses, doctors, police officers, pharmacists, public servants, factory workers, delivery drivers, or a number of other jobs which are critical to keeping our society functioning.

Where can I find more information?

Department of Education, Employment and Skills

You can call the department's schools hotline on 1800 677 027, or send us an email at schools@dese.gov.au.

Department of Health

For the latest health advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au.

Services Australia

For information on Centrelink payments to support those affected by COVID-19, go to <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/affected-coronavirus-covid-19>.

The Treasury

For information on the economic response to COVID-19, including support for affected workers, businesses and the broader community, go to <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus>.

National COVID Help Line

Call the National Coronavirus Help Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

National Mental Health Commission

The Commission provides mental health information and support for individuals that are feeling concerned, anxious or uncertain due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

24 hour, 7 day support lines include:

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800
- MensLine 1300 78 99 78
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

For more information including mental health tips, online resources and programs, go to <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/>