



RETURN TO SCHOOL: INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

As the COVID-19 pandemic persists in this country and beyond, essential changes in our interpersonal behaviour and day to day activities are now becoming the 'new normal' for everyone. One of the key challenges for our school during this pandemic is to balance the need for a practical, sensible level of caution with the need to provide a supportive environment for students, and where teachers feel able to engage with pupils in a way that supports their learning.

To help facilitate a smooth return to school for your daughter, please take the time to read the information in this document carefully. All aspects of this document should be explained to and understood by your daughter in preparation for starting/returning to school.

It is important for you as parents/guardians to accept that no interpersonal activity is without risk of transmission of infection at any time. Some level of risk of infection is unavoidable as part of a normal childhood, it is important that you have a clear understanding of the benefits and risks of education and that it is not possible to guarantee that infection can be prevented in any setting, either in school, in the community or at home.

The measures outlined in this document are aimed at risk minimalization of COVID-19 for students, teachers, other staff at St. Louis S.S., our families, and the wider community. The most critical part of managing the risks of COVID-19 is by all of us doing everything practical to avoid introduction of COVID-19 into the school.

If the infection is not introduced, it cannot be spread.

School Management (under DES recommendations), will endeavour to:

- **Minimise Risk** of introduction of infection.
This will involve the exclusion of pupils, staff members and visitors who are ill.

- **Manage Risk** of spread if infection by:
Regular hand hygiene,
Maintaining physical distancing,
Application of respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette,
Monitoring environmental hygiene within the school premises.

In school, we will endeavour to ensure that systems are in place for the safety of all within the school environment. You as Parents/Guardians are asked to reinforce and relay to your daughter the importance of:

- limiting interactions with other students travelling to and from school, on arrival and departure from school and in hallways and other shared spaces in school,
- being mindful of other student's personal space,
- avoiding the sharing of schoolbooks / materials /equipment, e.g. pens / rulers / calculators, etc.,
- avoiding behaviours that involve putting hand to mouth (putting pens/pencils in the mouth).

How can our family prepare for going back to school? Advice for Parents/Guardians of students:

- Don't bring your child to school if she has symptoms of a viral respiratory infection or if there is someone in your household suspected/known to have COVID-19. Contact you GP and inform the school as soon as possible.
- Don't bring your child to school if she has been identified as a COVID-19 contact. Inform the school as soon as possible.
- Ensure your daughter is aware that if they experience symptoms when at school, they should immediately inform a teacher/staff member.
- Ensure that the school has a current phone number (mobile, workplace and home) where you can be easily contacted in the event of symptoms/illness.
- Everyone entering the building will be required to perform hand hygiene using the hand sanitiser provided (located at entry points around the school).
- Visits to school by parents during the day should be by prior arrangement. Please note that access to the school for all Parents/Guardians/Visitors, will be by the main Convent front door. (Enter using the Convent building main gate on Castle Street (opposite Ginos/Vodafone shop).
- Parents/Guardians/Visitors to the school should maintain 2m physical distance where possible.

- Parents attending the school for meeting with Teachers should be by prearranged appointment only. Face coverings should be worn as per NPHET guidance. To avoid a congregation of parents in waiting areas, parents may be asked to remain in their vehicle (where applicable) until the teacher is free to see them.
- In relation to the drop off of forgotten items, e.g. books/lunchboxes, etc., a drop off point will be communicated to you later that will not require interaction with school staff.
- Parents should encourage students to keep long hair tied back (ponytail/plait). This will avoid excess hand to face contact during the school day.

Systems have been set up in school to avoid large gatherings/congregating of pupils within the school building. This will help in contact tracing, should the need arise.

* For the safety of the school community, parents are advised that the school reserves the right to decline entry to pupils who appear to have fever or respiratory tract infection. We request that parents endeavour to ensure that students are symptom free on arrival to school.

Recognising the symptoms of COVID-19 in your child.

- IF your child develops COVID-19 symptoms, seek medical advice by consulting with your GP. Remember that symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough or fever can be similar to those of the flu, or the cold, which are a lot more common.
- If your child is sick, keep them home from school and notify the school of your child's absence and symptoms. Request reading and assignments so that you daughter can continue learning while at home.
- Explain to your child what is happening and reassure them that they are safe, that there is no stigma associated with picking up this virus. Anyone can pick it up very easily, despite efforts not to do so.
- If you experience symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), you should self-isolate and phone your GP straight away to get a coronavirus test.

Common symptoms of coronavirus (www.hse.ie) include:

- a fever (high temperature - 38 degrees Celsius or above).
- a cough - this can be any kind of cough, not just dry.
- shortness of breath or breathing difficulties.

- [loss or change to your sense of smell or taste](#) - this means you've noticed you can't smell or taste anything, or things smell/taste different to normal.

It can take up to 14 days for symptoms to show. They can be similar to symptoms of [cold](#) and [flu](#). Getting an early diagnosis from your GP means you can get the help you need and take steps to avoid spreading the virus to others, if you have it.

Keep your child in school when healthy

If your child isn't displaying any symptoms, such as fever or cough, it's best to keep them at school - unless a public health advisory or other relevant warning or official advice has been issued affecting the school/region.

Instead of keeping your child out of school, teach them good hand and respiratory hygiene practices for school and elsewhere, like frequent handwashing, covering a cough or sneeze with a flexed elbow or tissue, then throwing away the tissue into a closed bin, and not touching their eyes, mouths or noses if they haven't properly washed their hands. The HSE website provides further information on how to wash hands properly to avoid the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

What should we expect when travelling to school on the bus?

When waiting for transport coming to and leaving school, physical distancing should be maintained. Where the vehicle is shared, (pupils from different schools on the same bus), this is essential to ensure that all families and school communities are protected.

Supplies of hand sanitizer, gloves or wipes should be available on board the transport vehicle for student's use.

Students over the age of 13 must wear a cloth face mask/covering on school transport and follow the direction of Bus Eireann in relation to protocols for using school transport

* Transport personnel will be empowered to decline to transport a student who has obvious infection symptoms (fever/coughing, etc).

Should my daughter wear a Face Covering/Mask in school?

Wearing of Face Coverings in Second Level Schools - Update 10/08/2020 -
Return to school information for parents/guardians

Following information from NPHET announcement on Friday 7 August, the Minister for Education has updated the recommendations on wearing face coverings in schools to reflect the latest research and expertise.

- It is now recommended that teachers and secondary school students wear face coverings similar to those worn in shops or on public transport.
- Exclusions apply only for students who for specific medical reasons or specific special educational needs
- We ask parents to ensure that their daughter has an adequate supply of face coverings for wearing and changing throughout the day, in school and travelling to and from school.
- If sharing transport (in cars) we recommend that parents consult in advance of pick-up with regard to health status each day and the wearing of face coverings in the vehicle.
- After placing on of masks and removing them, hands must be washed or sanitised. Cloth/fabric masks must be washed well each evening for continued effectiveness. Students using disposable masks must ensure that are disposed of carefully in a covered bin, followed by hand washing/sanitising.

Students/families who are symptomatic (have COVID-19 symptoms) must stay at home. The wearing of a mask is not acceptable for students coming to school who have COVID-19 symptoms.

Guidance on Mask Wearing (NPHET)

The purpose of face coverings is not to protect individuals themselves, but to reduce onward transmission of the virus.

- A cloth face covering should cover the nose and go under the chin,
- fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face,
- be secured with ties or ear loops,
- include at least 2 layers of fabric,
- allow for breathing without restriction.

Face coverings are not recommended for anyone who:

- has trouble breathing,
- is unconscious or incapacitated,
- is unable to remove it without help,
- has special needs and who may feel upset or very uncomfortable wearing the face covering,

You can only remove your face covering on school/public transport if you need to:

- talk to someone who has difficulties communicating,
- provide emergency help or care to a vulnerable person,
- take medication.

Helping children to cope with the stress.

- Over the past few months people have endured stress, anxiety and grief related to COVID-19. As a school we have many student support systems in place to help reassure students who may be feeling anxious or upset about their return to school. Students may wish to have a chat with our Guidance Councillor/with their Class Teacher/ Year Head about these concerns.

For Parents/Guardians, how can you help your daughter to cope with the stress?

As Parents/Guardians, you know children better than anyone else. Children respond to stress in different ways. Common responses include having difficulty sleeping, having pain in the stomach or head, and being anxious, withdrawn, angry, clingy or afraid to be left alone. Symptoms may vary depending on the age of your child. Respond to your child's reactions in a supportive way and explain to them that they are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. Listen to their concerns and take time to comfort them, show affection and talk to them about what is happening. Give them clear examples of what they can do to protect themselves and others from infection. Praise them frequently. Share information about what could happen in a reassuring way. If possible, take time to relax within the home and include regular exercise (with social distancing). Keep regular routines and regular healthy meal schedules as much as possible. Try to ensure they get a good 8 hours sleep.

Checklist for Parents/Guardians.

1. Monitor your child's health and keep them home from school if they are ill.

2. Teach and model good hygiene practices for your child.
 - Wash your hands with soap and warm water frequently, if soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty;
 - Ensure waste is safely collected, stored and disposed of;
 - Cough or sneeze into a tissue or your elbow and avoid touching your face, eyes, mouth and nose.
3. Encourage your daughter to ask questions and express their feelings with both you and their teachers. Remember that your child may have different reactions to stress; be patient and understanding.
4. Prevent stigma by using facts and reminding children to be considerate of one another.

Returning to School

All students, teachers, and other staff will be briefed on how the new systems in the school will operate for the coming year. It may take us all a little time to absorb the changes, but your continued support and preparation will help enormously. We look forward to having our school community together again albeit, in a different way.

**The information contained in this letter is based on the current COVID-19 status in Ireland and will be updated to reflect the changing situation as required.