



Monday January 31, 2022

Dear Families,

Welcome to the 2022 School year. I hope your family has had some opportunity for rest and relaxation over the holiday period and we look forward to working with you to bring faith filled learning to this wonderful cohort of young people in 2022. To those who are new to our community, I issue a very warm welcome and look forward to meeting with you over the course of the year.

I have received reports that there have been multiple staff and families within the school community compromised by the COVID illness and isolation requirements over the holiday period. We send out our best wishes to those who are unwell and wish them a speedy recovery. It appears, the community protections of immunisation, social distancing and robust hygiene practices are working to ensure safe outcomes for the majority.

As you would be aware, the Victorian Government recently outlined its Back-To-School plan. The measures set out in the plan are designed to ensure every possible effort is made to ensure staff and students are safe and that schools remain open.

There is extensive information within this correspondence, based on the Operational Guide of the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria in collaboration with the Department of Education. We want to provide families with the best information regarding key aspects of the Back-To-School plan to support the safe return of your student/s to school.

### **Rapid Antigen Testing**

Free rapid antigen tests will be made available for all staff and students in Victorian schools for the first four weeks of Term 1, 2022. Rapid antigen testing will be voluntary, but highly encouraged for all students and staff. We hope that families will take up this opportunity to support the safety of each member of our school community.

We have today received a supply of Rapid Antigen Tests to provide to students and staff for this week. Please see below the process for collection and distribution:-

#### **Students in Year 7 and 12**

- Each student in Year 7 and 12 will receive 1 box of 5 Rapid Antigen Tests which will be handed out during TA tomorrow morning (Tuesday Feb 1) to take home. Testing must be completed at home, before a student comes to school, and should NOT be done at school.
- Year 12 students must complete 1 test prior to coming to school on Wednesday for their Year 12 retreat, and also bring with them on camp, a second test, which is to be completed on Thursday morning.

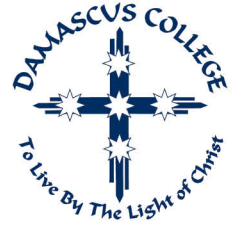
#### **Students in Years 8, 9, 10, and 11**

- 1 box of 5 tests will be provided on Wednesday February 2 for each family that has not already received a box from the previous day (through a sibling in Year 7 or 12).

Any students who were not present on Tuesday, can collect their test on Wednesday during TA.

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- Families with 3 or more students will receive an additional box during TA on Wednesday February 2.

A further allocation of Rapid Antigen Test will take place in the near future to ensure coverage of the remaining weeks of the 4-week testing period.

It is the intent that staff and students' complete tests at home on school days, ideally on a Tuesday and Thursday, prior to arriving at school, and must report any positive test results to the College through the PAM Absence process or by phone on 5337 2222.

The College will then contact each family to provide support whilst your student is in 7-day isolation. Information about how to complete a test, including a how-to video, is available online.

If a student receives a positive test result at any time, they must report this through the Department of Health system (Rapid antigen tests | Coronavirus Victoria) or via the coronavirus hotline on 1800 675 398.

### **Advice for Positive Cases**

Students who report a positive result must isolate for seven days and not attend school during that period.

All students and staff who return a positive result from a rapid antigen test should also follow the latest government health advice at <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/rapid-antigen-tests>.

Where a student is a household contact of a positive case (that is, they have spent more than four hours with someone who has COVID-19 inside a house, accommodation, or care facility) they must inform the school and isolate for seven days and not attend school during that period.

As Principal, I will notify the school community through email when a student or staff member has (or multiple students or staff members have) returned a positive COVID-19 test result and have attended the school or school activities. The notification will protect the privacy of the individual but will include:

- Dates of attendance
- Affected group/cohort/year levels
- Any relevant extracurricular activities undertaken

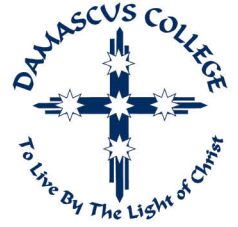
The notification may be provided to only the affected group/cohort/year level or we may notify the whole school community depending on the circumstances and the risks.

Staff and students must not return to school while they remain symptomatic, unless it is known that their symptoms are caused by an underlying health condition or medication.

Students who are required to isolate or quarantine will be supported by the school in the same way as students with an extended absence due to illness or injury, with learning materials provided. The level of support will depend on the capacity of the school to support continued learning and the number of staff available to do so. Our school is not able to provide a full remote learning program in these circumstances.

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### **What to do in the event of a COVID-19 exposure or a positive result?**

A student tests positive to COVID19, either through RA test or PCR test

- Isolate at home or in private accommodation for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and do not attend school during this period.
- Inform the school, that they have tested positive to COVID-19.
- A negative test is not required to return to school following completion of 7 days of isolation.
- Follow the Checklist for COVID cases located at: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/checklist-cases>

A student is a household contact to a positive COVID-19 case:

- You have spent more than four hours with someone who has COVID-19 inside a house, accommodation, or care facility.
- Follow the Checklist for COVID contacts. <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/checklist-cases>
- Student must quarantine for 7 days (inclusive of weekends) and must not attend school during this period.
- Contact at school is not included in this definition, unless contact has occurred in a school based residential setting, e.g. school camp or boarding school.

A student has been in contact with a case of COVID-19 at school:

- If asymptomatic, students should continue to attend school and monitor for symptoms.
- If symptomatic, all students must stay or return home, take a rapid antigen test, or get a PCR test if a rapid antigen testing kit is unavailable.
- On receipt of a negative test result, and if well enough, the student can return to school. If students are too unwell to attend school, usual leave/absence policies apply.

Follow the Checklist for COVID contacts. <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/checklist-cases>

### **Learning Continuity**

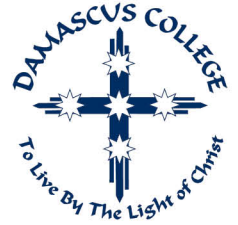
Our school community is deeply committed to providing learning continuity and ensuring that each young person has the best possible learning experience in 2022. We have a range of contingencies in place if members of our staff team contract COVID or are required to isolate as household contacts. We do anticipate that maintaining a full roster of staff may be a challenging issue over the coming weeks and we want families to be aware that we may need to ask particular year levels to stay home on a rotational basis so that we can provide an adequate duty of care and quality learning onsite. This may occur on relatively short notice. Any decision to cancel school or move to home-based learning will be after we have exhausted our other staffing options including, but not limited to,

- Drawing on our regular pool of committed and professional pool of casual relief teachers
- Utilising non-classroom teachers and school leaders redeployed into the classroom on some occasions
- Reducing school activities that draw teachers away from the classroom, such as professional learning programs and co-curricular activities
- Work with neighbouring schools to address staffing concerns
- Working with part time staff to extend their available hours where possible.

Any decision to cancel school or move students to home based learning for particular year levels will be as a last resort. This would be rotated to avoid the same groups having their learning impacted.

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### **Parents and Visitors coming onsite**

We appreciate the start of the school year is a challenging time regarding parents and carers coming onsite. In the early weeks of this year, we are limiting parents, carers and visitors who enter school buildings to reduce the risk of transmission. The school is aware of the challenges that the current restrictions impose and is required to observe the following requirements.

When parents, carers and visitors enter school buildings they are required to check in with a QR code and have the school confirm that they are fully vaccinated. This is not required if you are just dropping off or picking up your student/s.

We ask all parents, carers and visitors to practise respiratory etiquette and good hand hygiene, observe physical distancing, and follow face mask requirements when onsite.

Parents, carers and visitors attending school sites for drop-off and pick-up who do not enter school buildings do not need to comply with vaccination requirements.

### **First day of School**

To support students and families to navigate the first day of school on Tuesday and Wednesday, we will have staff outside to meet and greet new students and assist them to transition into their new learning environment. These are days of excitement and nervousness on the part of both students and parents. We are very experienced in supporting young people as they make a new start, so please be assured that when you hand them over to us, we will work incredibly hard to make sure their transition experience is a positive one.

### **Student Attendance**

While families may be nervous about students returning to school, all students are expected to attend onsite. Parent preference is not an approved reason for students to be absent due to COVID-19. Students who are required to isolate or quarantine will be supported in the same way as students with an extended absence due to illness or injury, with learning materials provided to support their continued learning.

### **Students who may be medically vulnerable**

In keeping with expert public health advice, some students (or families) may be at higher risk for severe outcomes or complications of COVID-19, for example those with chronic medical conditions. Parents or carers of any student with a chronic medical condition should seek advice from their medical practitioner about attending school on-site. If you have a child or children who is medically vulnerable, please reach out to us here at school, so we can work with you regarding the medical needs and your up-to-date condition-specific health management plan (such as an Asthma Action Plan).

### **Face Masks**

Face masks have proved an effective protection in previous outbreaks and are again a key protection:

- All Students from Years 7-12 must wear a face mask indoors at school, unless a lawful exception applies. Students must wear face masks even if vaccinated. Students are not required to wear masks outside unless social distancing can not be observed.

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- When attending outdoor school camps and excursions, face masks are not mandatory, unless physical distancing cannot be maintained. Face masks must continue to be worn when indoors on camps and excursions.
- Everyone over eight years old must wear a face mask when travelling to and from school on public transport, taxis or ride share vehicles.
- School staff must wear a face mask in all indoor settings, except where removal of a face mask is necessary for effective communication or teaching.
- Visitors to schools aged eight and above must wear a face mask in all indoor spaces, unless a lawful exception applies.

### **VCE/VCAL/VET provision in schools, TAFEs, non-school senior secondary providers and other training organisations**

Students can participate in face-to-face VCE or VCAL classes, including VET studies, where these are held at TAFEs, RTOs, non-school senior secondary providers, or schools. These providers may have their own requirements and families will be notified of these ahead of classes commencing.

### **Non-classroom based activities**

In planning for all non-classroom based activities (such as school assemblies) and extra-curricular activities, including camps, excursions, other out-of-school activities, incursions and learning activities such as sport, music and the arts during the first four weeks of term, we will give consideration to whether the activity can be completed in a COVID Safe manner, for example completed in smaller groups or conducted outside or online. Where we have the staffing capacity, we will make every effort to conduct the activity in a COVID safe way, after conducting the appropriate risk assessment and keeping you, our families, informed of the procedures we have in place.

### **Air purifiers**

Our school has received delivery of a number of Air Purifiers to be used throughout the school. Air purifiers have been placed around the school in high traffic areas and areas with lesser access to external ventilation.

### **Wellbeing**

For some families, the media and reporting surrounding the return to school will cause increased nervousness and concern in children and young people. There are a range of resources to support parents and carers on page 3 of the attached document.

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/quick-guide-to-student-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources.pdf>

Please reach out to the College via [info@damascus.vic.edu.au](mailto:info@damascus.vic.edu.au) if you have questions or concerns. For students who may be feeling vulnerable as a result of the return to school, please reach out to your TA, House Leader or [counselling@damascus.vic.edu.au](mailto:counselling@damascus.vic.edu.au). The response of this community to these challenges has been amazing over the past 2 years, and together we will navigate the times ahead.

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### **School Buses**

We have been advised by the Department of Education and Training that if school bus drivers become unwell, there may be alterations or cancellations to school bus routes. This may require families to make alternate arrangements regarding getting your young people to school.

We appreciate that this will be disruptive for families and endeavour to deliver that information as soon as it is available.

### **Stay home when unwell and get tested**

The most important action school communities can take to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 is to ensure that any unwell students remain at home and get tested, even with the mildest of symptoms. Everyone should consider their health before they attend school, and ensure that they are free from coronavirus symptoms and have not had recent contact with a person confirmed or suspected to have coronavirus.

### **Looking Ahead**

We look forward to a very positive year ahead working with staff and families in the education of your child. These guidelines are designed to keep everyone safe and able to continue with their learning. We express our gratitude to all families for your continued cooperation in following the above guidelines and ask that you contact the school if there are any further areas of concern.

Kind Regards,

Mr. Christopher Grant  
Interim Principal

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