



SUMMARY OF THE COVID SAFE SCHOOLS SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPS STANDING COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON LONG COVID AND REPEATED COVID INFECTIONS (18 November 2022)

The Covid Safe Schools Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry on Long COVID and Repeated COVID infections presents evidence on how schools pose a risk to the health of students, staff and families through repeated exposure in schools during waves of COVID-19. Considering the long-term health risks associated with COVID infection, we call on all Australian governments to urgently act to mitigate spread within schools.

The House submission discusses:

- The medical and scientific literature from overseas and in Australia on the health impacts of COVID infection and repeat infections on children, adolescents and adults (school staff and parents).
- The need for the precautionary principle based on the level of risk to the school population and their families of long-term health impacts from COVID infection and reinfection.
- Analysis of the literature on transmission within schools, with the conclusion that there is compelling evidence that schools are significant sites for transmission.
- We then outline the legal, professional and ethical obligations for schools and educators to provide a safe environment. These include Duty of Care, Disability Discrimination, ethical obligations to cater to families with chronic illness, and Occupational Health and Safety. Finally, we interpret state obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child to balance the right to health and to access education.
- The final section of the submission includes analysis of mitigation measures to reduce transmission within schools. These include:
 - Ventilation measures and a discussion of how they need to be properly implemented to ensure *actual* safety rather than false assurances.
 - An extensive review of the scientific literature to demonstrate that masks are effective in reducing transmission; why schools are particularly risky sites for transmission; and how young children can wear masks; how schools can play a role in education around masking.
 - An analysis of how psychology, culture and government messages influence the level of masking. We conclude that we will need mandatory masking in schools for safety during major waves with the longer-term goal of education and a cultural shift to support masking. It is unfair on kids and teens to make them outliers in protective behaviours and

one-way masking does not follow scientific principles of making schools safe from transmission. They are an easy mitigation.

- How air purifiers can be part of a strategy of layered protections within schools.
- How implementation within schools needs to be improved so COVID safety is taken very seriously by Education departments, school leaders and teachers.
- Vaccines and boosters need to be up-to-date to protect the population and based on recent science around waning immunity, new variants and new vaccines.
- Remote learning should be provided as an option for periods of high transmission and families who are vulnerable to COVID Infection

Covid Safe Schools believes that any discussion of long COVID and repeated infections requires understanding how to reduce transmission during waves. There is an unacceptably high risk to our young people in schools in Australia and staff deserve safe workplaces. It is time for governments across Australia to ensure we protect teachers and that every child can go to school safely — without the risk of long-term health impacts due to COVID infection.