



## The Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier  
Minister for Education  
Minister for the Coordination of Education and Training: COVID-19

1 Treasury Place  
East Melbourne Victoria 3002  
Telephone: +61 3 9651 1222

COR 2048837

Nicole Millis  
Chief Executive  
Rare Voices Australia  
PO Box 138  
MENTONE 3194

Dear Ms Millis

Thank you for your recent email regarding the Andrews Labor Government's response to coronavirus (COVID-19) and Australians living with a rare disease. I apologise for the delayed response. As you would appreciate, it has been an exceptionally busy time.

I know these last few months have been difficult for everyone, no matter their circumstances. I am so proud of the incredible work our students, teachers, support staff, principals and school communities are continuing to undertake during this challenging time.

As Minister for Education, the wellbeing of students and school staff is my greatest responsibility. That's why the Victorian Government has followed, and continues to follow, the advice of the Victorian Chief Health Officer, which is that schools remain safe places for staff and students.

Based on the advice of the Victorian Chief Health Officer, regional and rural schools have moved to Stage 3 restrictions and metropolitan Melbourne schools have progressed to Stage 4 restrictions to reduce the movement of students and families across the State and slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Department of Education and Training (the Department), is working very closely with Victoria's Chief Health Officer and experts within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to monitor and respond to coronavirus (COVID-19) and support school communities to provide safe educational environments and minimise the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission.

Schools across Victoria, with the exception of specialist schools in rural and regional Victoria, have now returned to remote learning for all year levels until at least 13 September 2020. The return to remote learning is significantly reducing the movement of more than one million students and their families across metropolitan Melbourne and helping to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

For students and staff continuing to provide and receive onsite supervision and learning in mainstream and specialist schools, the Chief Health Officer has provided reassurance that schools remain safe places for staff and students when the recommended health and safety advice is followed.

Hygiene, enhanced cleaning and other precautions will continue to apply in all schools. On the advice of the Victorian Chief Health Officer, all school staff and secondary school students attending schools are also now required to wear face coverings. Staff also continue to be required to maintain 1.5 metres distance from other adults in education settings.

Whilst most students are now be learning from home, parents and carers of children and young people with complex medical needs who are still attending on-site should consult with their medical or health

practitioner to support informed risk assessment and decision-making about whether on-site education is appropriate. With regards to students who live with medically vulnerable members of the community, the Victorian Chief Health Officer has advised that risk of transmission in the school environment is low with health and safety measures in place.

Principals should consult their staff to identify those willing and able to work on-site, either on an ongoing or rostered basis. Principals should also ensure that staff are consulted on, and have input into, the ways that work may be organised and allocated. Where teachers and support staff are not required on-site, they must work from home.

Staff most at risk of severe illness should continue to individually assess appropriateness for on-site attendance with support from their medical practitioner. Advice from the Victorian Chief Health Officer is that, as with other members of the community, teachers and other school staff may be at greater risk of more serious illness if they contract coronavirus (COVID-19) if they are:

- aged 70 years and older
- aged 65 years and older and with chronic medical conditions
- of any age and have a compromised immune system
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and are aged over 50 years and with one or more chronic medical conditions.

Staff who are medically vulnerable should seek advice from their medical practitioner in relation to their on-site attendance. Similarly, staff who are living with or caring for elderly or chronically ill relatives should seek advice from the medical practitioner of the person for whom they are caring to determine if they can attend on-site or should work remotely.

The situation is changing rapidly so the best place to get up-to-date information about coronavirus (COVID-19) and what is happening in Victoria is [www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au](http://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au).

Further information, frequently asked questions and advice can be found on the Department's dedicated coronavirus (COVID-19) website:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/Pages/coronavirus.aspx).

If you would like further information, please contact the Department by email: [health.advice@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:health.advice@edumail.vic.gov.au).

Thank you for raising this matter with me. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



**The Hon James Merlino MP**

Deputy Premier

Minister for Education

Minister for the Coordination of Education and Training: COVID-19