

Aide Memoire

Public health advice on options to open secondary schools

Date due to MO: 17 August 2020 Action required by: 17 August 2020

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE Health Report number: N/A

To: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Health

Contact for telephone discussion

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Purpose of aide memoire

1. This Aide Memoire provides you with summary advice and talking points on the public health implications of the Education Report *Options for senior secondary school attendance under COVID Level 3*, for an oral item you are taking to Cabinet.

Background

2. The COVID-19 Public Health Response (Alert Levels 3 and 2) Order 2020 (the Order) came into effect from 11.59am 12 August 2020. The Order imposes Alert Level 3 restrictions in the Auckland region and Alert Level 2 restrictions across the rest of New Zealand. The order was issued pursuant to the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 (the Act).
3. Section 9 of the Order permits persons to leave their home or place of residence for the purpose of attending an education entity which has the Alert Level 3 requirements in place, if they are permitted to attend the education entity under those requirements. Section 11 of the Order specifies that schools which are open within Alert Level 3 areas must limit students' physical attendance to years 1 to 10.
4. You have been provided with an Education Report, *Options for senior secondary schools attendance under COVID Level 3*, which recommends reopening secondary schools for year 11 to 13 students who wish to return to school.
5. The Ministry of Education has indicated that less than 10% of year 1 to 10 students are currently attending school in Auckland given Alert Level 3 restrictions. They anticipate

that fewer year 11 to 13 students would attend if given the opportunity, and that schools would target small groups of students requiring increased support.

6. The Ministry of Education has estimated that, at most, around 2,000 students at each of years 11, 12 and 13 might take up the opportunity to return to schooling at Alert Level 3.

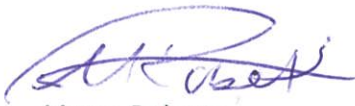
Advice

7. Schools bring together students from a diversity of household bubbles and can be a material vector for the spread of COVID-19. Opening schools to year 11 to 13 students would increase the risk of COVID-19 spreading in the Auckland community.
8. The Order excluded year 11 to 13 students returning to school because of their relative capacity to continue their learning at distance, and because students aged 15 to 18 can remain home independently (allowing their parents to return to work if needed and appropriate).
9. However, we also recognise that as students near the end of the school year, those studying towards NCEA or an equivalent qualification may need heightened support to ensure educational success.
10. If schools open to year 11 to 13 students, we would recommend ensuring numbers of students attending remain as low as possible, and are limited to those who are vulnerable, and at some risk to their health or person if they do not attend school for the duration of Alert Level, or who are unable to progress their education at home.
11. If you decide to open schools to year 11 to 13 students, we will work with the Ministry of Education to:
 - a. identify constraints on year 11 to 13 students returning to school to ensure only those students who need to return to school physically do so
 - b. explore options to limit year 11 to 13 students returning to school in some Auckland communities, particularly those which have active clusters (and where the risk of COVID-19 spreading is heightened), while noting the equity implications of such options
 - c. ensure schools which physically open to year 11 to 13 students have evidence of all appropriate controls to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading, including changes to usual timetabling and class structure to maintain strict student bubbles, physical distancing where possible (or mask use where not).

Talking points

12. While many students at years 11 to 13 can – and are – learning well by distance in Auckland, remote learning is not working for all students.
13. As the end of year approaches, some senior secondary students may need more support from their teachers to make sure they succeed.
14. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for certain year 11 to 13 students to return to school physically during Alert Level 3. This might include students who are vulnerable and need the support which school and teachers provide, or who are unable to learn from home.

15. For that reason, I intend to expand access to physical schooling to year 11 to 13 students, but only where this is strictly required for their health, wellbeing or education.
16. Based on the numbers of students currently attending school physically in Auckland, I expect the numbers of students at years 11 to 3 attending to be low.
17. We are already asking these schools to take steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 with their year 9 and 10 students, and I expect that these same protections will extend to year 11 to 13 students who attend.
18. I will be asking the Ministries of Health and Education to work together closely to ensure that only students who need to attend school physically do so, and that schools are evidencing appropriate steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
19. This might include only extending this opportunity to schools in some parts of Auckland, where active clusters make schools opening to more students inappropriate.



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