

Tuesday 26 July 2022

Dear school community

### **Important information about COVID-19**

Welcome back to the new school term. I hope families were able to enjoy the school holidays. As many of you would be aware, COVID-19 case numbers are increasing in the ACT and we're expecting numbers to peak in the coming weeks. This is happening at the same time as there is an increase in other viruses in our community, including influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). This increase in case numbers will have impacts and challenges for all of us. We expect to see more people away from workplaces and unable to participate in their usual day to day activities – including teachers and students in classrooms. While our schools are actively planning to ensure learning will continue over the Term, it remains extremely important that we continue to take personal actions to minimise the impact of COVID-19 in our schools and community.

My advice to the ACT community is as follows:

- remain up to date with your COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations. Get a COVID-19 vaccine booster if you are eligible.
- stay at home if you have any symptoms of COVID-19 and get tested
- for persons aged 12 years and over wear a mask when in crowded indoor environments and where physical distancing is not possible. Masks continue to be required when entering certain high risk settings (eg. hospitals and aged care facilities) and for household contacts who are attending school or work.
- plan ahead and know what treatments, such as COVID-19 antivirals, may be available to you.

There have also been some recent changes and updated advice around COVID-19 that I would like to remind you about.

### **COVID-19 reinfection timing**

If it has been more than 28 days since you were cleared from isolation and you develop new COVID-19 symptoms, you should get tested for COVID-19 and stay at home. If you return a positive test result, you should follow the ACT Health advice for people who test positive to COVID-19.

This new advice follows Australian Health Protection Principal Committee recommendations to reduce the reinfection period from 12 weeks to 28 days.

This is based on increasing evidence that prior infection with COVID-19 provides limited protection against reinfection with the Omicron BA.4 / BA.5 subvariants. These subvariants are expected to become the dominant strain and are more transmissible than earlier variants we've seen in Australian and in the ACT.

## **Find out if you're eligible for COVID-19 treatments**

Eligibility for COVID-19 treatments have expanded. You're now eligible for COVID-19 treatments, such as antivirals, if you are:

- 70 years or older
- 50 years or older with 2 or more risk factors for severe disease
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, aged 30 years and over with 2 or more risk factors for severe disease
- 18 years and older who are moderately to severely immunocompromised.
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Treatments can stop COVID-19 infection from becoming severe and prevent hospitalisation. Talk to a GP or another health professional now about your COVID-19 treatment options, including how you would arrange for early treatment if you did get COVID-19.

## **Winter COVID-19 vaccination dose**

Adults aged 50 to 64 years are now recommended to get a winter COVID-19 vaccine dose (second booster). Adults aged 30 to 49 years can also get a winter COVID-19 vaccine dose, however the benefit for people in this age group is less certain. Winter doses can now be given 3 months after the first booster dose (previously 4 months).

COVID-19 vaccine booster doses give more protection against becoming seriously ill from COVID-19. The coming wave of COVID-19 infections is serious. I am urging everyone to keep up their COVID Smart behaviours to protect yourself, your families and your school communities.

Regards

***Dr Kerry Coleman***

**ACT Chief Health Officer**

*I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people.*

*I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.*