

EOTC and Outdoor Education under a long-term approach to COVID-19

What does this mean for EOTC and Outdoor Education?

Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) and Outdoor Education (OE) are hugely valuable components of an authentic rich curriculum. It's great that schools offer students and staff opportunities to connect with each other and their environment, have rich learning experiences, and enjoy the benefits of being in nature.

Your school already has a plan for managing Health and Safety, as we move forward embedding the management of COVID-19 (and other infectious illnesses) into business-as-usual plans is important.

The guidance below helps highlight how the current requirements relate to EOTC and OE.

The key controls for schools and all workplaces are:

- ensure people with COVID-19 symptoms or feel generally unwell stay away from school and get tested
- enable good hygiene practices
- ensure good ventilation (open doors and windows)
- encourage vaccination including boosters where eligible.

Key considerations for EOTC and OE

Those unwell stay home

- School staff are to observe students before leaving on EOTC events, checking for symptoms, and asking those presenting as unwell to go home. Have a robust plan in place for all those involved if anyone reports they are feeling unwell during an event.

Ventilation

- Open windows and doors whenever possible
- Work outside whenever practical.

Good hygiene practices

- Coughing into their elbow
- Trying to avoid touching their faces
- Hand washing and drying

Masks

- Consider the use of masks for Household contacts where practicable, particularly when they are working in close proximity indoors or when vulnerable people are present.

Along with your usual risk management approach for EOTC or OE activities you will need to consider:

- [Symptoms of COVID-19](#) (which may be like other illnesses in the early stages)

- The importance of protecting those vulnerable to respiratory illness. Do you know who on your staff, in your volunteers and in your student population may be at greater risk?
- Whether, in the event someone was to become ill, you have the facilities to be able to respond, including the ability to isolate that person immediately and if needed, to get cases home.
- Whether you have access to appropriate personal protective equipment and the ability to clean hard surfaces if someone were to become ill with infections such as flu, gastro bug, or COVID-19.

Case management

Planning will need to include how to respond to cases and Household contacts, whether they are staff, volunteers, or students.

- When cases do arise, they can travel back to their homes to isolate. However, public transport cannot be used to do this.
- Planning must consider how cases will be returned safely to their homes to isolate.
- Caregivers should be made aware before the trip of any likely need for them to come and pick up their child from the venue if that child is identified as a case or possible case and if rapid antigen tests (RATs) will be available to students.
- Household contacts ([defined here](#)) are able to continue their daily activities (i.e. stay at camp or go on EOTC activities) as long as they have no symptoms and test negative daily for 5 days from the day the case tested positive. Household contacts are encouraged to wear a mask in settings where it is practicable to do so and particularly when vulnerable people are present.
- If returning students to their home during the trip is not going to be possible then you will need a plan for cases to isolate in-situ.

Where cases need to isolate in-situ:

- they should be separated from others
 - cases can isolate together
- Anyone who is identified as a confirmed case will be required to isolate for 7 days.
 - Anyone from the overnight trip/camp who is a Household contact ([defined here](#)) of that case is able to continue their daily activities (i.e. stay at camp) as long as they have no symptoms and test negative daily for 5 days from the day the case tested positive.

On a school camp with multiple tents/cabins, if you share the same room or tent on camp you **would** be a Household contact but you **would not** be a Household contact if you spent time with the case on camp but didn't sleep in the same space.

However, if a smaller group stayed overnight at an Airbnb or house together they **would all** be Household contacts.

All Household contacts are required to follow the steps outlined by Manatū Hauora |Ministry of Health [here](#).

- Close contacts ([defined here](#)) should self-monitor for symptoms for ten days.
- Anyone in the group, including close contacts of a confirmed case, who is symptomatic (even if only very mild symptoms) should be encouraged to get tested for COVID-19.

Working with External Providers

Working closely with the external provider is a very important part of your planning.

You and the external provider will need to agree to your joint health and safety plan for the event. Together, you should consider and discuss:

- Symptoms of COVID-19 (which may be like other illnesses in the early stages).
- How to protect those students, staff or volunteers that may be at greater risk to respiratory illness? Include individual plans for those vulnerable to serious illness with COVID-19.
- The management of a situation in the event someone was to become ill, including the ability to isolate that person immediately and how cases or possible cases will be returned safely to their homes for testing and/or isolation. See requirements [here](#).
- Do you have appropriate personal protective equipment and the ability to clean hard surfaces if someone were to become ill with flu, gastro bug, or COVID-19?
- Good hygiene practices (e.g., will they provide hand sanitiser in common spaces?). Soap, water, and the ability to dry hands must be provided in bathrooms.

It is important that all students and staff understand how crucial it is to:

- Practice good hygiene
- Notify a staff member at the first sign of feeling unwell

Use Form 6 (EOTC External Provider Agreement form) from the [EOTC Tool Kit](#) to guide and record your discussions with the provider.

Links

Ministry of Education:

[COVID-19](#) Information and advice for students, whānau, and the education sector
[School Bulletin](#)

Good hygiene practices will continue to be a priority as the best way to minimise potential spread of COVID-19. The [COVID-19.govt.nz](#) and [Ministry of Health](#) websites are a good source of information.

Department of Conservation: [DOC's response to COVID-19](#)

Sport NZ: [Information for the Sport, Recreation and Play sector](#)

FAQs

Can I take my Outdoor Education class tramping on public conservation (DOC) land?

Yes, but remember if you arrive at a hut that is at capacity, or that you have not booked (if it's a Bookable hut), you will need a tent.

Check [DOC's response to COVID-19](#) for the most up to date information and the individual huts and tracks you are planning to use for any DOC alerts before you go.

How do I deal with a COVID case on my trip if there is just one toilet?

Where it's not possible to have separate bathrooms/toilets, you can put in place other strategies to minimise the risk such as:

- getting students to all have masks to wear to the toilet
- having some signal system in place so if you have a positive case and they are at the toilet the other students know to wait well away and for 10-15 minutes after the positive case has used the toilet
- taking a spray disinfectant with you and spraying the toilet seat and any high touch surfaces after use
- having a separate roll of toilet paper for the positive student
- leaving the toilet door open to ventilate the space.

Should our school permit overnight experiences e.g., multi or overnight camps at managed facilities (i.e., External providers such as Hillary Outdoors), tenting at public conservation land?

Yes, overnight camps offered by external providers can go ahead. You need to work closely with the provider to ensure all the health and safety requirements are agreed upon, including how you will manage any cases or Household contacts.

Longer and overnight tramping is permitted, and tents are allowed.

Can we go tenting?

Yes, you can use tents.

Is there a maximum number of students that can stay at an external provider's facilities?

There is no maximum number of students.

Is it OK to travel to complete assessments for our senior OE students?

Yes

No one should travel if they are feeling unwell or are required to isolate as a positive case.

Is there a maximum trip length?

No, there is no recommended length of time for trips, that is a school decision.

Are there specific procedures we should now follow for a potential illness on camp?

You should follow the requirements set by your school for infectious illnesses.

If you are working with an external provider, you will need to agree to these procedures as part of your agreed health and safety plan for the event.

How do bunkrooms at external providers work?

The emphasis should be on good hygiene, including hand washing or sanitising hands before entering the bunkroom and leaving the room if you need to cough or sneeze (or using your elbow). Keep rooms well-ventilated. Records should be kept of which bunkroom each student was in. This is important as students that shared a bunkroom with a positive case become Household contacts.

Can I use shared accommodation such as backpacker hostels or commercial camping grounds?

Yes, as with any external provider, you will need to work closely with the provider to ensure all the health and safety requirements are discussed and agreed to by the school and the provider.

Are sports trainings and sports competitions considered in this document?

No, [Sport NZ advice](#) should be followed for sport competitions and teams. This guidance only considers curriculum-related activities.

Can I run an event that involves students from a number of different schools?

Yes, activities with large numbers of students can go ahead.

What would be best practice for food preparation and meals on camps?

Follow the most up to date advice on food preparation from the [Ministry of Primary Industries](#).

If a participant were to become unwell on a multi-day trip, would you recommend that the trip ends for everyone involved, i.e. a multi-day tramp should everyone return home to self-isolate or would it be sufficient to send the unwell person home?

As you would do at school, you need to have a plan for isolating the sick student until you can get them home. Getting the student home could involve getting a parent to pick them up at the nearest practical location.

You should have access to Rapid Antigen tests for (voluntary) symptomatic testing of students and staff as part of your school supply. Alternatively the parent/caregiver should arrange for testing for COVID-19. A reminder that RAT testing is not always accurate and can provide a false negative result.

Public transport should not be used to transport someone suspected of or confirmed with COVID-19 unless specific advice from public health officials states otherwise. Students that have shared a bunkroom or tent with a positive case are classified as Household contacts and must follow the requirements for Household contacts detailed [here](#). For small groups sharing a Airbnb or house all of those staying there would be considered Household contacts. Parents should be informed about the school's wishes around picking up unwell students and Household contacts before the trip.