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March 16th 2020.

Re: COVID-19 (coronavirus) preparations at Tecoma Primary School

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This letter informs you of the steps we are taking as a school community during the outbreak of COVID-19. The Department of Education and Training (DET) continues to work closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to plan for and respond to the likely impact on schools. We are ensuring that all of our measures help the children feel safe, and maintain routine as much as possible. Our processes are informed by advice from DET who keep us closely informed of the developing situation and our response. We are making modifications to what we do, for example, no assembly this morning as this could be considered a mass gathering. Until further notice, we won't run assemblies.

For the latest advice follow this link to the DET coronavirus advice page:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/departments/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

Will we close?

We will only close if we are directed by Victoria's Chief Health Officer. This would be due to someone in our school community being confirmed with COVID-19, or a person having close contact with a confirmed case within the last 14 days. 'Close contact' is defined by DHHS as someone who has had at least 15 minutes of face-to-face contact, or shared a closed space for more than 2 hours.

We have been advised today that pre-emptive school closures are not likely to be effective as a public health intervention introduced (eg no mass gatherings) to prevent community transmission of COVID-19 at this time. At present, there is currently limited information on the contribution of children to transmission of COVID-19. Advice given states the potential reduction in community transmission from pre-emptive school closures may be offset by the care arrangements that are in place for children who are not at school. There is a particular risk associated with the fact that children may require care from vulnerable grandparents or may continue to associate (and transmit infection) outside of school settings.

DET advice today states the impact on otherwise healthy children has been minimal to date. For pre-emptive school closures to be effective, prolonged closure is required and it would be unclear when they could be re-opened. If there were still a large pool of susceptible students when schools are re-opened, there would be likely to be re-emergence of transmission in the community. School closures may still be considered late in the outbreak in anticipation of a peak in infection rates, for a shorter period of time. Short term reactive school closures may also be warranted to allow cleaning and contact tracing to occur.

If this advice changes, parents and families will be given as much notice of closure as possible, including informing anyone who may have been in close contact with the confirmed COVID-19 case.

What happens if we close?

We are releasing staff to prepare some work for the children to do, should there be a closure in the future. This is a difficult task as much of the work we do does not involve worksheets. However, continuity of learning is paramount and we will do our best to supply work that goes near to meeting what we would be covering during face to face time. We have the use of

Google Classroom in grades 3-6 and we will be utilising this. We are constructing booklets that includes personalised work for the children in Prep-2 to complete. I want to acknowledge and thank our staff for the swift response they have made in preparing for a possible closure. DET will be launching an online learning portal which will allow teachers and students to continue learning, and Flexibuzz will also be used to communicate with students and families.

How can we help at home?

Children can become overwhelmed and stressed with such events. It is important to remain calm, maintain routine, and let them know that we are doing everything to keep them safe. Encourage the children to continue the hygiene routines they practice at school, including washing their hands, and coughing or sneezing into their elbows. Information regarding this is listed below.

In further news, at 9.50pm last night, all school were informed of the following:

CAMPS AND EXCURSIONS

All camps scheduled to commence from and including Tuesday 17 March must be postponed and rescheduled, or, if there is no other option, cancelled. All excursions outside the school for purposes such as visits to cultural institutions, art galleries, theatres and sporting events or facilities (other than those local facilities regularly used by the school) planned from and including Tuesday 17 March must also be postponed or cancelled.

This means a number of events that we have planned are now postponed:

- End of term assembly including the Shave for a Cure
- Year 5/6 science fair tomorrow night
- Grade 3/4 camp to Ferngully Lodge April 20-24
- 1000 steps Anzac Day Service April 22
- Grade 1/2 excursion to Old Gipps town April 24
- Year 6 Shrine of Remembrance Service May 1

We don't wish to go any further with cancellations or postponements at this stage as we don't know how long these measures will be in place.

INTERNATIONAL ARRIVALS

Everyone arriving into Australia from overseas from midnight (15 March) will be required to self-isolate for 14 days. This obviously includes students and staff who may be returning from overseas excursions or other travel. Importantly, it also includes parents and carers and any other relatives or friends of students who are returning from overseas travel. As they are required to self-isolate, they must not visit the school to pick up children or for any other reason.

We continue to reinforce hygiene messages with the children.

Prevention – Hygiene

- Posters detailing correct handwashing and coughing & sneezing are displayed around the school
- Teachers are allowing students extra time to wash their hands.
- We have ordered extra quantities of soap and hand sanitiser.



If you have further queries or concerns, please contact the school.

Take care,

Rohan Thompson
Principal