

COVID safe HSC written exam protocols for principals and presiding officers

Supported by NSW Health: updated 30 September 2021

Our focus is to ensure the safety of presiding officers, supervisors, students and markers. NESA will continue to take advice from NSW Health and work closely with the school sectors.

We will be regularly updating schools and presiding officers in the lead up to the start of the HSC exams via email.

This document aims to:

- help keep everyone involved in the HSC written exams healthy and safe
- help principals and presiding officers to understand their roles in planning for and conducting COVID safe written exams
- help principals and presiding officers minimise disruption to HSC students if their school has a COVID case(s) during written exams.

The principal and presiding officer must discuss these protocols and agree on the processes to be followed to minimise disruption to students before and during an exam.

COVID safe plan and exam day protocols

1	Vaccinations
Students <ul style="list-style-type: none">• HSC students are strongly encouraged to be fully vaccinated in time for their exams.▪ Students who are 16 years and over and who live in local government areas of concern in Sydney can access a priority Pfizer vaccination appointment.▪ Students who are 18 years and over can make an AstraZeneca booking via the COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Checker.▪ Students with underlying medical conditions can make a Pfizer booking via the COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Checker.	
Presiding officers, supervisors and school staff	

- All school and HSC supervision staff must be fully vaccinated by 8th November. Refer to point 12 for further information on finding additional supervisors.
- NESAs will check the vaccination status of presiding officers.
- Presiding officers will be responsible for checking the vaccination status of supervisors prior to the first exam. Further information will be provided to presiding officers.

2 Student arrival at exam venue

- Students must arrive and report directly to their designated exam room/screening area.
- Students must follow school check-in and check-out protocols using their school established check-in and out processes.
- Prepare student room allocations and provide to students in advance so they can move quickly to their designated exam room/s.
- Break up cohorts in student number order to keep consistent with the way exam materials and papers are packaged.
- Schools must keep accurate records of the location of exam rooms and the students and supervisors present in each room.
- For large exams, consider organising students to arrive to different arrival points in smaller groups and at staggered arrival times to allow for screening prior to entering into their exam rooms
- All reasonable steps must be taken to prevent the mingling of students from different exam sessions and any visiting students
- School staff should be available to ensure students are not interacting in any groups before or after exams.
- Students must stand a minimum of 1.5m apart while waiting for screening and before entering in the exam room. Use ground markings or stickers to indicate where students should stand.
- Advise students to only attend for the shortest amount of time required to complete screening and exam procedures. Schools will need to add screening time to the time students are already required to be in the exam room; eg:
 - 30 minutes before the student's first exam + time required for screening
 - 10 minutes before all other exams + time required for screening.

Sign off and departure procedures

- Students should only remain in the exam room for the required amount of time after the exam to sign off the Student Completion Record.
- The presiding officer should efficiently allocate supervisors to rows of students to allow for immediate sign off the Student Completion Record after the exam.

Students should leave immediately after signed off, rather than as a cohort or group.

- If students have a morning and afternoon exam in the same day, ensure there are enough alternative or outdoor spaces for break times between exams to avoid interaction or mingling of students.

4 Supervisor arrival at exam venue and breaks

All presiding officers and supervisors must follow school check-in and check-out protocols using NSW Health QR codes.

- Provide enough QR code sheets to avoid mingling of supervisors at the check-in location. Maintain minimum 1.5m distance at check-in.
- Stagger supervisor arrival times to avoid mingling at check-in area.

If using multiple rooms, supervisors should report to duty then collect exam materials required and move to their allocated exam room

Stagger supervisor break times to minimise mingling of supervisors in staff rooms or break areas.

Supervisors must maintain 1.5 metres distance from others at all times, including when on breaks.

Exam supervisors must also be screened when they present for their shift (see point 5).

5 Student screening prior to entry to exam rooms

Students must not attend an exam if:

- they have any, however mild, cold or flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore/scratchy throat, shortness of breath, loss of taste or sense of smell)
- they have been tested for COVID-19 and have not yet received their test result
- they have been directed by NSW health to [self-isolate](#)
- they have tested [positive for COVID-19](#)
- they are a designated [secondary close contact](#). The student must get a COVID-19 test and self-isolate until they and the close contact receive a negative result.
- someone in their household has symptoms of COVID-19. The [household member](#) should be tested and if they are negative, the student can then return to school.

The principal must ensure that students are screened using their school sector's protocols. Screening should include asking:

- if they or someone in their household have any flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore/scratchy throat, shortness of breath, loss of taste or sense of smell) or if they have visited a venue of concern,
- if they have been tested for COVID-19 and have not yet received their negative test result.

- if they have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 or at a venue of concern and are required to self-isolate.

Wide-scale temperature checking should not be used to screen students.

Students who present with negative COVID-19 test results may participate in the exam unless they have been asked by NSW Health to self-isolate.

If a student reports symptoms or other information during the screening process or prior to an exam:

- Students should be advised to undergo a COVID test and seek medical advice. Students will require supporting evidence for any illness/misadventure application submitted.
- The presiding officer must be notified of any students not permitted to enter the exam room due to COVID safe screening.

Exam supervisors must also be asked screening questions by the presiding officer when they present for each shift. Any exam supervisor who reports or displays symptoms must be sent home, seek testing and not return to work until they have a negative test result and are symptom free.

6 Face masks must be worn

Students, presiding officers, supervisors and school staff must wear a mask while at the exam centre (both inside and outside). Further information will be provided to presiding officers about checking student identity or malpractice concerns.

7 Exam rooms: physical distance at exam venues and limiting exam room sizes

- **Exams must be held in well [ventilated](#) spaces.**
- Apply a minimum 1.5m distance between students in exam rooms.
- If conducting an HSC exam in a hall, ensure that doors and windows are opened to allow a high level of ventilation.
- If possible, keep exam group sizes small. Limiting student numbers per room ensures that in the event of a confirmed case, fewer students will be identified as close contacts – making contact tracing easier.
- Schools should isolate the HSC exam rooms from the remainder of the school where possible.
- Supervisors must maintain 1.5m distance wherever possible.

8 Hygiene and cleaning practices

- Principals must ensure Hygiene supplies are available in each exam room, including hand sanitiser and alcohol wipes. Items must be regularly re-stocked. Hand sanitiser and wipes should be readily available for students and staff to use.

- Students must use hand sanitiser at entry into the exam room
- Exam rooms are cleaned daily
- Desks and chairs should be wiped down by the student at the end of their exam and the wipe placed in rubbish bins provided as the student leaves the exam room.
- Ensure there is a nominated hygiene marshal to monitor cleaning and ensure desks wiped at end of each session. This may be an additional supervisor or member of the school staff.
- Students, supervisors and presiding officers must not share stationery or other items.
- Each room must display [COVID-safe signage](#):
- QR check-in
- Masks
- Physical distancing
- COVID hygiene reminders
- Any other signs as required by your school sector.

All supervisors and students must practice good personal hygiene during the exam including:

- Regularly wash or sanitise their hands
- Cough and sneeze into their elbow
- Avoid touching their face

NESA will provide an allowance to each presiding officer and supervisor for the purchase of their own personal protective equipment.

Presiding officers should ask supervisors to bring their own pens or shared items must be wiped between use.

9 Students who display symptoms during an exam

Students displaying any flu-like symptoms must be acted upon quickly. The student must be asked to leave the examination centre immediately and arrange for a COVID-19 test.

- Principals must ensure that a school delegate with sufficient authority is available for the full duration of each exam to make any determinations needed, should the presiding officer observe a student showing flu-like symptoms
- Should the school delegate determine that a student must leave the exam room, the student must be isolated and collected from school. Advise the student to be tested for COVID-19 and seek medical advice. Students will require supporting evidence for any illness/misadventure application submitted or to return to their next exam.
- The presiding officer must:
 - notify exam supervisors of the need to immediately alert the presiding officer about any students who show signs of flu-like symptoms during an exam

- ensure that any student who shows signs of flu-like symptoms during an exam is not interrupted by anyone except the school delegate
- request the school delegate to enter the exam room to observe any student who show signs of flu-like symptoms and make a determination about returning the student home or not.

10 Students with known illnesses

Principals should be aware of students with a clinical history or known illness that may present as a COVID-19 like symptom/s.

Principals must ensure:

- the student provides written evidence from their doctor or GP that the symptoms they are displaying are of a known medical condition and are normal for the student. As a precaution, a negative COVID-19 test is recommended. Any change in symptoms may warrant repeat COVID-19 testing, especially if new COVID-19 like symptoms develop.
- the presiding officer is notified of these students in advance of the exams

11 Visiting students

Visiting students should be minimised where possible. If a visiting student is required to attend the school, a plan must be in place to limit mingling of student cohorts while moving around the school:

Principals and presiding officers should arrange for visiting students:

- Make prior arrangements with these students to confirm arrival protocols and times. Ask students to arrive to a separate area for screening.
- Supervise in separate rooms by the same supervisor each time
- Avoid mixing or mingling outside of exams.

12 Back-up presiding officer and supervisors

Recruiting additional supervisors and having supervisors available on-call will help ensure that exams can continue if the presiding officer and/or any exam supervisors are identified as close contacts and required to self-isolate.

On-call supervisors must meet all NESAs requirements (including WWCC) and be fully vaccinated.

The presiding officer should:

- nominate a supervisor to act as their second in charge, if the presiding officer is required to self-isolate
- consider having additional supervisors available on-call

Finding additional supervisors:

- NESAs can provide advice on recruiting more supervisors if required.

- Principals may release school staff to assist in supervising exams if there is a shortage of exam supervisors. Any teaching or non-teaching staff member can assist, except teachers of the course being examined. The presiding officer should keep records of any school staff working as supervisors rostered and provide to NESA via email.

13 Alternative venues

The school principal, in consultation with the presiding officer, is responsible for developing and implementing contingency plans to minimise disruption to exams due to a COVID related school closure. This may include identifying an alternative venue.

Specific arrangements must be considered for your school, considering your location, number of students and rooms or spaces available to the school. Consider other arrangements where younger students can stay home to allow for more accommodation or alternative spaces on campus.

The alternative venue must be:

- located close to the school so students can easily travel to the venue on short notice and the presiding officer can travel between the security centre (where the exam papers are stored) and the venue twice per day
- adequately lit and ventilated
- as free as possible from external noise
- appropriate for students with approved disability provisions
- venues should be able to be set up for the exam at short notice (alternatively, a venue that can remain setup for the duration of exams would be ideal)
- agreed by the principal and the presiding officer.

In the case of small exam cohorts (less than 20 students), a neighbouring high school, in the same LGA, may be considered. Procedures for visiting students should be followed and to minimise mixing between schools, students should be kept separate from the host schools' students, staff and facilities including separate entry and exit points.

If no other alternatives can be found schools may consider the use of neighbouring primary schools, in the same LGA. The host school must have facilities that ensure students are separated from the primary school students and staff. Procedures for visiting students should be followed and must include separate entry and exits points.

14 Communication protocols of a positive case at your school

If someone in the school tests positive to COVID-19 during the written exams period:

1. The principal must follow NSW Health instructions and their sector's Confirmed Case Protocols.
2. The principal or sector representative must notify:
 - the presiding officer during school hours

- NESA on 0407 522 402 if after school hours
 - if notified, the presiding officer must contact NESA Presiding Officer Support for further advice
3. Students must follow instructions from NSW Health and the principal
 4. The principal must notify students about changes to arrangements for HSC exams
 5. The principal and presiding officer must refer media enquiries to the NESA media team on (02) 9367 8370.

Exams should proceed as scheduled unless NSW Health advise otherwise.

For exams to recommence:

- The area used for HSC exams must be cleaned in accordance with NSW Health and school sector requirements; or
- Proceed at a pre-arranged alternative venue, ensuring you have enough available supervisors.

15 Illness misadventure process available

Students who are required to self-isolate will be covered by the [COVID illness and misadventure process](#) for that period. A medical certificate or other evidence will be required.

Contact us

Presiding Officer Support | P: 1800 200 955 | E: presidingofficers@nesa.nsw.edu.au

COVID-19 Support | P: 1300 138 323 | E: covid19support@nesa.nsw.edu.au

Emergency after hours contact **during the exam period:** Lauren Graham 0407 522 402