

Guide to COVID-safe End-of-Year – Events for Schools

November 2020

Background

The Public Health (Restricted Activities – Gatherings, Business or Undertakings) Emergency Direction 2020 (No. 13) commenced at 9.00am on 13 November 2020. The new Direction provides that public gatherings can have a maximum of 500 people (excluding staff) with one person per four square metres in indoor spaces and one person per two square metres in outdoor spaces.

It is recognised that end-of-year celebratory events are important events in our school calendars. However, in view of the risks associated with transmission of COVID-19, schools will need to consider carefully how to plan and host modified events.

The Chief Health Officer has indicated that these end of year school events may go ahead, on the proviso that they operate in accordance with this guidance document.

The Public Health Direction has been modified to enable certain end-of-year events to take place on school grounds, if schools so wish. These events can include school formals and graduation ceremonies and end-of-year assemblies. Schools are asked to minimise the number of events that take place.

They should consider carefully which events should take priority over others, in order to minimise risk.

It should also be noted that the situation can change very quickly. Schools need to be mindful of the fact that any planned events may be subject to change or cancellation due to a need to amend the public health advice and/or directions at short notice.

Core Considerations

As an absolute minimum, schools will need to consider the following measures in their planning for all end of year events to ensure that they are COVID Safe.

- › Physical distancing of 1.5 metres must be maintained between adults at all times. This does not apply to household groups.
- › Physical distancing requirements do not apply to students from the same school. However, they are strongly encouraged to maintain good hand hygiene and use non-contact forms of greetings.
 - This principle applies to students whether they are on or off the school site.
- › Where appropriate, ensure density limits (one person per four square metres for indoor spaces and 1 person per two square metres for outdoor spaces) can be maintained across the event venue, up to a maximum of 500 people (this is further explained following).

- › Ensure measures are in place to enable staff, students and the parent community (if involved) to maintain good hygiene – hand washing, cough and respiratory hygiene.
- › Clear messaging to stay home if unwell, and get tested if COVID-19 symptoms are being experienced (regardless of how mild).
- › Regular venue cleaning and disinfecting, particularly for high-touch areas.
- › Maintain a list of contact details for every person who attends an end-of-year event. It is strongly recommended that schools use an electronic method for recording contact details where possible to better assist ACT Health’s contact tracing efforts, if needed. ACT Health has developed the free Check in CBR app and schools are encouraged to use this app for all of their end of year events.

Venues – non-school venue versus on school site

- › End-of-year events can be held at a non-school venue or on the school site.

Non-school venue

- › The school must adhere to all of the COVID Safe requirements of the venue. It may be helpful for schools to request a copy of the venue’s COVID Safe Plan to familiarise themselves with it.
- › Gathering restrictions now provide that venues can have a maximum of 500 people, or one person per four square metres (whichever is lesser) for each indoor space. Outdoor spaces can have a maximum of 500 people, or one person per two square metres (whichever is lesser) for each outdoor space.
- › Under the Public Health Direction, the non-school venue can exclude its own staff members from the person count at the event, but not staff employed by the school who are also in attendance.
- › If the student cohort is large, and a non-school venue is planned to be used for the event, consider hosting separate, smaller events to ensure compliance with public gathering and density restrictions.
 - These events can be held at different times, or concurrently if separate rooms or spaces (including outdoor spaces) are available.
 - If more than one function room is to be used within a non-school venue, and the venue is also able to be accessed by the general public, it is recommended that students remain in their allocated room to avoid movement across public spaces and potential interaction with the general community.
 - If the venue is not being used by other members of the public, students can move between function rooms and share activities (ie. photo booth, games), however, consideration needs to be given to ensuring the maximum capacity for individual rooms is not exceeded.

Tiered Seating

- › The Public Health Direction provides that an event can take place in a concert venue, theatre, arena or auditorium with 50 per cent of seating capacity, up to 1,000 tickets. These types of events must be ticketed and attendees must remain seated.
- › Should schools wish to use a venue that contains tiered seating, they may consider using the abovementioned criteria. This may be more relevant for graduation ceremonies, school assemblies or school concerts. A COVID Safe Plan must be in place for each event.

School venue

- › Events held on the school site – will allow for maximum student participation (refer to gathering numbers below in relation to parent involvement).
- › Students and staff members will not be required to be included in any gathering limits when events are held at the school.
- › Where schools do not have the physical capacity to host events on site, consideration can be given to the use of another school site as long as there is no mixing of visitors and adequate

time allowed for cleaning the school site prior to resuming usual school activities.

- › If hosting events on-site, schools must develop a COVID Safe Event Plan which would identify and seek to minimise the risks of COVID-19 to students, staff and the broader community.
- › All staff members working at the event should be thoroughly briefed on the contents of the COVID Safe Event Plan.
- › This guidance is designed to assist schools to develop their Plan.

Duration of Events

- › Aim to keep the duration of events to less than two hours wherever possible, particularly where the event involves the wider school community (parents and carers) and is located indoors.
- › Where events involve the student cohort and supervising school staff (only), they are able to be held for longer periods of time

Guests (Parents and Carers) and Gathering Numbers

- › In view of the improved situation across the ACT, NSW and Victoria, updated advice provides schools with the option of including students from other schools - whether the event is on the school site or off the school site. This could include, for example, invited guests to school formals. However, if schools decide that students from other schools can attend an event, the one person per four square metre density requirement should apply (whether held on-site or at a non-school venue).
 - The school must also consider the increased public health risk of combining different social networks, noting that it may have a flow on effect to multiple schools and throughout the community. Additional risk mitigation measures may therefore need to be applied.
 - If schools have an ongoing relationship with another school, where the students interact on an ongoing basis, consideration could be given to hosting a joint event. However, schools should be mindful of the increased risks associated with bringing together larger social networks.
- › Consideration will need to be given to whether parents and carers will be invited to attend certain end-of-year events (eg. graduation ceremonies and assemblies).
 - If parents and carers are to be invited to events held on school sites, density and gathering restrictions will apply - one person per four square metres up to 500 people for each indoor space; and one person per two square metres up to 500 people for each outdoor space (excluding staff and students).
 - Year 10 or Year 12 Graduation or Valedictory Ceremonies which take place on-site, and involve only the Year 10 or Year 12 cohort (staff and students) from a single school are permitted to have two family members per student, up to a maximum of 500 additional guests, without the need to comply with person density requirements. However, extra care must be taken to manage ingress and egress and discourage congregation of groups. The stable public health environment allows for this to occur but schools should note that restrictions may be tightened at short notice if the situation worsens.
 - If parents are not invited (see alternative options below), there will be no gathering restrictions and the school's usual COVID-safe policies should apply.
- › If the event is held at a non-school venue, the current public gathering and person density restrictions will apply to all attendees, but excludes staff of the non-school venue.
- › Where parents and carers are invited to attend events on the school site, consider hosting separate, smaller events to reduce gathering sizes and duration of the event.
 - If the events are to be held at different times, ensure there is sufficient time between events to allow for thorough cleaning of the venue and to enable parents and carers to leave the school.
 - If the events are to be held concurrently, ensure that the two different cohorts do not mingle.

RSVPs and Contact Information

- › In order to control attendee numbers, it is strongly recommended that you ask all participants (including parents, carers and students) to RSVP to the event.
- › It is also strongly recommended that schools make the events 'ticketed' events, to manage and control gathering sizes.
- › The school must keep contact information about all students, staff and other attendees who have attended the end-of-year events for contact tracing purposes. This information should be confidentially stored for a period of 28 days. If requested, this information must be provided to public health officers. The contact information must include name, phone number and the date and time persons attended the event.
- › As noted earlier, an electronic method for recording contact details is strongly encouraged. ACT Health has developed the Check in CBR app to assist all business and organisations to collect personal contact details.
- › When tickets are issued, consider providing prospective attendees with the following details:
 - Recommendations around physical distancing and hygiene behaviours.
 - Details about the controls which are in place to minimise the risk of transmission.
 - Recommendations to download and activate the COVIDSafe app.
 - Recommendation to download the Check in CBR app and activate it prior to attendance.
 - Clear advice not to attend the event if unwell or to leave the event if COVID-19 symptoms, or any other symptoms of illness develop.

Seated Events (eg Graduation Ceremonies, School Assemblies and end of year Concerts)

- › Events, such as graduation ceremonies, end of year concerts and school assemblies, must be seated.
- › Students, staff, parents and carers attending graduation ceremonies and school assemblies should be encouraged to remain seated at all times except when arriving and leaving the event, or when using bathroom facilities.
- › Seats should be set up in a way that always provides physical distancing of 1.5 metres between adults. This does not apply to household groups.
- › Parents and carers should be encouraged to leave the school as quickly as possible following the completion of the event. They should not mingle.
- › It is recognised that school formals will operate differently, allowing students to move around the venue.

Parking at School Events

- › Consider parking arrangements and flow of people before and after the event, particularly how crowd movement will be monitored and managed. Consider potential points of congestion.

Catering

- › If the event is off-site, in a non-school venue, the venue will be required to comply with all public health restrictions relating to the hospitality sector.
- › If refreshments are to be provided for shorter events (assemblies) on the school site, ensure these are not buffet or 'self-serve'. Refreshments which are served by an employee are permitted, or alternatively, individually wrapped servings can be supplied for attendees to collect.
 - Ensure that any queues are safely managed and flow allows for physical distancing.
 - Ensure that provision of catering does not encourage people to mingle, or at a minimum encourage people to only intermingle with those individuals that they commonly interact with (eg household or close friendship groups).
- › If a longer event (formal or dinner) is to be held on the school site, the following is advised:
 - Ensure appropriate consideration is given to preparation and service of food, in accordance

with relevant regulations.

- Seated dining must be provided in accordance with Public Health Directions and guidance material for the hospitality sector.
- There should be no self-serve buffets or communal snacks and condiments.
- Individually served or plated meals are recommended.
- Share platters and cocktail food are to be avoided.
- Non-disposable cutlery/crockery/glassware is permitted only when cleared after each course and washed using a commercial-grade dishwasher or glasswasher.
- If more than one event is to be held concurrently, there should be separate wait and kitchen staff for each function, wherever possible.
- Ensure all catering staff are aware of safe food-handling practices.
- Tables must be spaced in a way that ensures people at different tables can remain at least 1.5 metres apart (does not apply where student cohort only is involved in the event).

Cleaning and hygiene

- › Non-school venues must have processes in place to ensure that the venue is appropriately and regularly cleaned.
- › For events to be held on school sites:
 - Provide handwashing facilities for all attendees and staff including clean running water, liquid soap, paper towels. If handwashing facilities are not readily available, provide an appropriate alcohol-based hand sanitiser at regular intervals.
 - Clean frequently touched areas and surfaces regularly with detergent or disinfectant
 - Establish areas where attendees who become unwell during the event can be isolated from other attendees.

Dancing

- › Dancing is permitted.
- › If dancing is planned, it is suggested that the venue provide an oversized dance floor.
- › Dancers should be encouraged to space out as far as possible.
- › Schools may wish to impose additional parameters around dancing - ie. only 30 people on the dance floor at any time etc.

Photography

- › Group photography is permitted.
- › Photographs should be kept to a minimum, with no more than 15 minutes total for each group.
- › Schools must put in place measures to maintain physical distancing whilst persons are waiting in queues.

Livestreaming Events

- › Schools may wish to consider livestreaming events to provide families with an alternative to physical attendance, or to enable additional family members to be involved due to capacity restrictions.
- › Another option may be to film the event for families to view at home.
- › Individual school policies in relation to live streaming and filming should apply.

Formal 'Arrivals' Ceremonies

- › Any formal 'arrival' ceremonies should be discouraged as these ceremonies encourage crowds to form outside of the school or non-school venue.

Pick-up and Drop-off arrangements

- › Ensure that any pick-up and drop-off arrangements do not result in crowds forming.
- › Encourage parents and carers to remain in their vehicles when collecting students from events.

Before and After Parties

- › Schools should discourage families from hosting large before and after parties.
- › While there are currently no restrictions on household visitations, we are asking all Canberra residents to be sensible when having people over to their homes, and have their own control measures in place.
- › In particular, they must know who is there and at what times, to assist with contact tracing efforts, if required.
- › Schools could remind families of the shared responsibilities in keeping Canberrans safe and reducing any risk of transmission of the disease.

Schoolies Graduation Festivals

- › While it is recognised that these events are not organised by schools, the Chief Health Officer advises that these types of events are considered very high risk, and present similar concerns to mass gathering events. Schoolies graduation festivals have been cancelled in several jurisdictions.
- › If students are considering attending a 'schoolies' event, particularly in another jurisdiction, they should adhere to the requirements and restrictions in that jurisdiction.
- › Students should also adhere to individual jurisdictions' travel and health advice when considering any schoolies events.

COVID Safe Event Protocol – A Safe Return to Events in the ACT

- › ACT Health recently released a COVID Safe Event Protocol (the Protocol) to provide guidance to event organisers planning an event within the ACT.
- › It is ACT Health's preference that all schools use the Guide to COVID Safe End-of-Year Events for Schools when planning their end of year events, rather than the Protocol.
- › However, if during the planning process schools determine that it is unviable to arrange an event that adequately meets their needs, and all options have been exhausted, they can consider submitting an exemption request in accordance with the Protocol. Please note that depending on the nature of the event, additional restrictions and requirements may be imposed on schools through the exemption process.

Flexibility in Events

- › The ACT Health Directorate is continuously reviewing the Public Health restrictions, based on regular COVID Safe Checkpoints. The next Checkpoint is scheduled for 27 November 2020. If the situation in the ACT remain stable, and the situation across our neighbouring jurisdictions continues to improve, it may be possible to implement a further easing of restrictions. Alternatively, should the situation in the ACT worsen, restrictions may be tightened.
- › This may see a change to public gathering requirements. Schools are therefore encouraged to consider scalable options for their events during this uncertain period.

Further information

You can find COVID-19 health advice on the ACT Government website, including the current status in the ACT and how to protect yourself and others.

There are a number of resources available on the website, including signage and posters that can be downloaded and used during your event.