

# 2021 Guide to COVID-safe End-of-Year Events for Schools

*November 2021 (Version 2.0)*

## Background

It is recognised that end-of-year celebratory events are important milestones 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 enables certain end-of-year events to take place on or off school grounds. These events can include school formals and graduation ceremonies, end-of-year assemblies and performances.

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.

**Schools will also need to give careful consideration** to the additional risks posed for primary school students who are not able to receive an approved COVID-19 vaccination at this time, and therefore any end of year activities or events should seek to minimise any increase in social networks and interactions. Activities should be restricted to year cohorts wherever possible and be in accordance with the current version of the Health Guidelines.

## 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.

- All events will require a COVID Safety Plan to be developed.
- All end of year events must adhere to the relevant Public Health and Social Measures (PHSM) in place at the time of the event, including any mask wearing and density requirements. The PHSM may be dependent on whether the event is being held on or off school grounds and whether the parent community is involved.
- Events over 1000 must be ticketed, or attendees must pre-register their attendance.
- Physical distancing of 1.5 metres should be maintained wherever possible.
- Ensure measures are in place to enable staff, students and the parent community (if

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involved) to maintain good hand and respiratory hygiene (including ensuring that hand sanitizer is available throughout the venue and having spare masks on hand).

- Students should be strongly encouraged to use non-contact forms of greetings.
- Schools should provide clear messaging to all participants to:
  - stay at home if unwell and get tested if COVID-19 symptoms are being experienced, no matter how mild.
  - not attend if they have been identified as a positive COVID-19 case, or a close contact of a positive case.
- If the event is being held on school grounds, ensure that there is a plan in place for regular venue cleaning, particularly for high touch areas.
- Use of the Check in CBR app for all end of year events.

## *General Event and Exemption Information*

- Events greater than 1000 people must submit their COVID Safety Plan to ACT Health for Review. This can be done via the online form that is available on the ACT Government's COVID-19 website.
- Exemptions will be required for events greater than 2000 people or beyond the density restrictions, in accordance with the COVID Safe Event Protocol. The Protocol can be accessed on the COVID-19 website
- ACT Health has also developed a COVID Safe Event Checklist for events with less than 2,000 people to provide guidance to event organisers planning an event within the ACT. Once completed, the Checklist can be regarded as your COVID Safety Plan. This Checklist can be accessed on the COVID-19 website.
- 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 Checklist or Protocol documents. 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 may wish to consider submitting an exemption request.
  - Please note that depending on the nature of the event, additional restrictions and requirements may be imposed on schools through the exemption process.

## **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.

### *Events held at non-school venues*

- Events must comply with the PHSM in place for the venue in which the event is being held (dancing is permitted). Events must also adhere to any additional COVID Safe requirements in place. It may be helpful for schools to request a copy of the venue's COVID Safe Plan to familiarise themselves with it.
- From 12 November 2021, gathering restrictions will permit venues to allow:

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- one person per two square metres for each useable indoor space (density requirements are not required outdoors)
- Events over 1,000 people must be ticketed or pre-registered (smaller events can use the Check in CBR app)
- All events must have a COVID Safety Plan and events over 1,000 people must submit their COVID Safety Plan to ACT Health.
- Events over 2,000 people must seek an exemption from ACT Health.
- The non-school venue can exclude its own staff members working at the event itself from the density limits. However, staff employed by the school who attend venue will need to be included.
- 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 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 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 (i.e.. photo booth, games), however, consideration needs to be given to ensuring the maximum capacity for individual rooms is not exceeded.

## *Venues with Fixed and Tiered Seating*

- Events can take place in indoor theatre-style venues with fixed and tiered seating with 100 per cent of fixed seating capacity or one person per two square metres for unfixed seating areas. This includes school venues.
- Attendees should remain seated wherever possible.
- These types of seating arrangements may be more relevant for graduation ceremonies, school assemblies or school concerts.

## *Events held at school venue*

- Events held on a school site will allow for maximum student participation (refer to section on Guest and Gathering Numbers below).
- Students and staff members will not be required to be included in any gathering limits when events are held at the school.
- Face masks are not required to be worn by students at end of year events held on school sites.
- Where schools do not have the physical capacity to host events on site, consideration can be given to the use of another school site if there is no mixing of

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

- A COVID Safe Plan must be in place for each event. The Plan will need to 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 can be held for longer periods of time.

## *Guests (Partners, Parents and Carers) and Gathering Numbers*

- Consideration will need to be given to whether partners, parents and carers will be invited to attend certain end-of-year events (e.g. graduation ceremonies and assemblies).
- If partners, parents and carers are to be invited to events held on school sites, density and gathering restrictions will apply (excluding staff and students):
  - one person per two square metres for each useable indoor space and
  - maximum 2,000 people without requiring an exemption.
- If partners, parents and carers are not invited (see alternative options below), there will be no gathering restrictions and the school's usual COVID-safe policies should apply.
- Where partners, 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 partners, parents and carers to leave the school.

## *RSVPs and Contact Information*

- In order to control attendee numbers, events over 1,000 people must be ticketed or attendance pre-registered.
- The Check in CBR app must also be used to assist with contact tracing purposes, if required.

- 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.
  - 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, should be seated, wherever possible.
- Seats should be set up in a way that always provides physical distancing of 1.5 metres.
- Parents and carers should be encouraged to leave the school as quickly as possible following the completion of the event.
- 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 held off-site, in a non-school venue, the venue will be required to comply with all PHSM relating to the hospitality sector.
- If refreshments are to be provided for shorter events (assemblies) on the school site, seek to avoid buffet or 'self-serve' if possible. If not possible, the following additional risk mitigation measures should be applied and documented in the event COVID Safety Plan:
  - Ensure that self-serve refreshments/buffets are appropriately supervised by staff, particularly in peak times.
  - Ensure that hand sanitiser is available and used by attendees prior to accessing the buffet.
  - Regularly replace shared utensils with clean ones.
  - Shared communal items (e.g., milk jugs) should be regularly wiped down or handled by staff only.
- Alternatively, refreshments can be individually wrapped servings and provided 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 (e.g. 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 PHSM and any guidance material for the hospitality sector.
  - Self-serve buffets should follow advice outlined above for 'self-service' of foods.
  - Individually served or plated meals are strongly recommended.
  - Share platters and cocktail food should be avoided wherever possible.
- 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 on site concurrently, there should be separate wait and kitchen staff for each function, wherever possible.
- Ensure all catering staff are trained in 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 may become unwell during the event can be isolated from other attendees.

## *Dancing*

- Dancing is permitted at end-of-year school formals.
- There should be a dedicated dance area that provides adequate space for participants to maintain some form of physical distancing.



- Encourage participants to dance within their social groups.
- If venues have an outdoor space, consider using this area to allow dancing to take place.

## *Photography*

- Group photography is permitted.
- Schools must put in place measures to maintain physical distancing whilst persons are waiting in queues.

## *Livestreaming Events*

- Schools may like 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 adhere to the PHSM.
- Spectators should be encouraged to maintain at least 1.5 metres from people they do not normally socialize with, wherever possible.

## *Pick-up and Drop-off arrangements*

- Ensure that any pick-up and drop-off arrangements do not result in significant 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.
- Gatherings must comply with restrictions involving household visits, if in place at the time of the event. If no restrictions are in place, we would ask 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.

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## *'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 high risk, and present similar concerns to mass gathering events.
- 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.

## *Flexibility in Events*

- The ACT Health Directorate is continuously reviewing PHSM in place for the ACT. If the situation in the ACT should worsen, there may be a need to further tighten PHSM, to avoid overwhelming out hospital system and public health system capacity.
- 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.