

Circular 8348**from 16/11/2021****COVID-19 - Procedure for the management of Covid-19 cases and contacts in children's communities: Schools**

This circular repeals and replaces circular(s): No. 8302

The "Wallonia-Brussels Federation" is the name usually given to the "French Community" referred to in Article 2 of the Constitution.

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Brief information	Following Minister LINARD's announcement that some school tracing activities would be taken over by the regions, ONE, AVIQ and COCOM have developed a new protocol for case management in schools, with the aim of simplifying this task for actors in education. This circular contains the relevant elements for school management.
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Keywords	COVID-19 - case management Covid-19 - PSE - class closures
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<u>Note</u>	For reasons of readability, this circular is not written in inclusive script, but it is nevertheless addressed to both men and women, as well as non-binary people
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Institutions and organising authorities concerned

Education networks	Teaching units
Wallonia-Brussels Education Official subsidised set Free subsidised set Free confessional Free non-confessional	Ordinary Kindergarten Ordinary Primary Ordinary secondary Secondary school in alternation (CEFA) Specialised Kindergarten Specialised Primary Specialised secondary Self-teaching centres Advanced Technology Centres (ATCs) Outdoor Recreation Centres (ORCs) Technical centres

Recipient groups also informed

To all members of the following groups:
 Inspectorate services (for their respective units) The General Service for the Steering of Schools and CPMS
 The organising authorities (for their respective units and networks)
 PO's representative and coordinating bodies (for their respective units and networks) Ministerial cabinets in charge of education (for their respective units)

To members of the following groups, provided they are registered in the distribution system: The
 Auditors
 Provincial governors Trade unions
 Representative organisations of parents' associations

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

As previously announced, Minister Bénédicte LINARD, responsible for Health Promotion in Schools, has negotiated with the Regions to allow the resumption of certain tracing activities by the Call Centres in the management of Covid-19 cases in schools.

Since the beginning of this year, I have been well aware of the many difficulties and the enormous workload that school tracing represents for the directors, and the resulting pressure on the organisation of schools and families.

The ONE, the AVIQ and the COCOM have therefore agreed on a new case management protocol which aims to simplify procedures, make exchanges between the parties involved more fluid and limit the involvement of each party to what is strictly necessary, in order to allow the management and the school health promotion teams to resume their basic missions.

There are three main new features:

- The Call Centre will contact Covid positive students and staff members or high risk Covid contacts and issue the necessary quarantine and testing certificates;
- The role of the school management will be limited to the distribution of a simplified communication to parents in three specific cases: to warn of the presence of an index case (in a class, in case of an emergency break and school closure). This means that there is no longer any question of high-risk and low-risk letters as used up to now. On the other hand, support to the PSE team during the survey of cases that will have to be carried out in order to determine if an emergency break is necessary;
- An Emergency Break procedure is being introduced. This will allow the PSE to automatically close a class as soon as 25% of the pupils test positive over a period of 7 days (the Services de Promotion de la santé à l'école (PSE) will be able to adapt the threshold for special education where the groups are smaller);

A four-step procedure has been developed, which is outlined below, as well as what is expected of you.

In order to communicate in the best possible way, you will find a visual attached which summarises the procedure and which you can disseminate via your usual communication channels (website, Facebook page, e-mail chain, WhatsApp group, etc.).

A summary table is also provided at the bottom of this document.

It is hoped that this simplification of the process will, once the system has been tested, really ease the pressure of tracing on school actors.

Caroline DESIR

Case management protocol in school communities

The 4 steps are detailed here for completeness, as schools are only involved from step ³ onwards. A ^{5th} point has been added to address the issue of staff testing positive within the school community.

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1. An index case¹ is identified:

The person who has tested positive (or his or her legal representatives) is contacted by the call centre, which will start the contact tracing and identify high-risk contacts. As a reminder, these contacts will have to be tested and quarantined according to the rules in force in the general population² without the school being involved in the process.

New guidelines have been given to the call centre agents to also investigate contacts in schools. The pupil or his/her parents will therefore have to identify the school contacts at that time.

NB (if parents ask):

- If the index case or the guardian representing him/her does not have access, at the time the call centre contacts him/her, to all the details of the high-risk contacts he/she identifies, he/she can make an appointment with the call agent who will call him/her back later, in order to provide all the details of the HRCs (in the script) or contact the call centre again later to complete his/her declaration, in accordance with the existing procedure
- If a pupil considers him/herself to be a high-risk contact and has not been identified as such, he/she can contact the index case (or his/her parents can contact the parents of the index case). The index case can contact the call centre again to complete the list of HRCs, according to the existing procedure.

High-risk contacts will be contacted by the call centre, which will provide the necessary testing requirements and quarantine certificates.

2. The Call Centre contacts the PSE team and the PSE team contacts the management

The call centre will send the relevant information about the index student to the relevant PSE department or CPMS-WBE3.

The PSE team, upon learning of the index case, contacts the school to inform them of it and, with the help of the school, links the pupil to his/her class in order to maintain a surveillance system of the number of cases within the schools and more precisely within the classes (which will allow the implementation of the Emergency Break). This will help to see where possible health closures are needed and to monitor the situation.

Managements do not have to do anything until they are contacted by their PSE team, even if they are aware of a case by other means.

¹ A confirmed case of Covid-19 from which tracing will start

² For information: <https://covid-19.sciensano.be/fr/procedures/home>

³ This will be done twice a day in Brussels and systematically in the Walloon Region, via IT platforms.

3. Management disseminates information to parents

Once the information of the presence of an index case has been received from the PSE, **school managements will inform parents of the presence of a covid-19 case in** a class, by the means of communication they consider most appropriate (via a note in the class agenda, a schoolbag, a chain mail, a WhatsApp group... etc).

For this communication, the following word will be sent:

"The PSE department has reported a positive case of Covid in your child's class. We urge you to monitor for symptoms for 14 days and not to visit vulnerable people, including grandparents, people over 65 years of age or people with chronic illnesses.

In cases where there is significant circulation of the virus, call centre delays to index cases and high-risk contacts may be longer. However, information often spreads quickly, especially with all the current means of communication. Managements and PSE may be called upon before the call centre can intervene.

In this case, and even if it is complicated on the ground, the managements should not take over a situation that has not yet been dealt with by the call centre and communicated by the PSE/CPMS-WBE, so as not to interfere with the procedure in place.

The management can tell the parent who calls to inform them of a case or follow-up of a case they have heard about that ***"the case will be managed by the call centre and, once the PSE team is informed of the situation, they will contact the school management, who will inform the parents of the class concerned.***

We stress this point because for the system to be efficient, it is important that everyone can work without overlapping information and communication.

4. The Emergency Break

This is one of the major simplifications of the system. The PSE closes a class as soon as a certain threshold of contamination is reached in the group. This threshold is set at 25% of COVID-19 positive pupils in a class over a period of 7 days in mainstream education. For special education, as class sizes are smaller, the PSE may adjust the Emergency Break rate. Staff members are not counted in the Emergency Break except in the kindergarten class because the teacher does not wear a mask

The class is defined as the main class according to the school's organisational arrangements. By investigating the cases with the PSE team, it may be decided that another class should be taken as a reference (e.g. the management finds that the cases are concentrated in a philosophy course, a professional practice course or an elective course).

Once the Emergency Break is activated by the PSE, the class is closed:

- Everyone undergoes a 10-day quarantine (including staff in nursery education, as the mask is not worn by the whole community), regardless of vaccination status, with the possibility of shortening the quarantine if a test is carried out on D7 and is negative (in accordance with the rules applicable in society in general);
- People with a certificate of recovery (or a recent Covid infection) must also complete the quarantine, but they can leave the quarantine at D8 without testing;
- The period of vigilance remains 14 days (protective measure for vulnerable people).

A letter signed by the PSE team should be given to the parents of the class concerned by the school management, via its usual communication channels (see attached model letter for information).

If the health situation is complicated, the PSE team will contact the AVIQ or the COCOM, who may then decide on a school closure. A letter will also be provided by the PSE team and will have to be distributed by the school management to all parents of the pupils concerned by the closure, through its usual communication channels.

5. Special case: staff members

The supervisory staff member testing positive for Covid-19 will be contacted by the call centre. They will then be asked to provide a list of students/colleagues with whom they have had high-risk contacts (it is therefore advisable to prepare this in advance of the call: surname, first name and telephone number for each high-risk contact reported), which will enable the test codes and the quarantine certificate to be generated.

The call centre contacts the occupational health service for adult case management. Occupational health contacts the school management.

The measures for child cases apply and the system is set up as for any other case. In summary:

- In kindergarten: all children are considered high risk and will have to observe a 10-day quarantine with testing on D1 and D7. The quarantine can be lifted on receipt of the first test result if negative;
- In primary schools: an analysis of contacts will be carried out
 - If high risk: same instructions as for kindergarten;
 - If low risk: Managements will inform parents of the presence of a case of COVID-19 in a class.

The same message as for student index cases can be used:

"The PSE department has reported a positive case of Covid in your child's class. We invite you to monitor for any symptoms and not to visit other children for 14 days.

vulnerable people, including grandparents, people over 65 or people with chronic diseases".

- Secondary: an analysis of contacts will be carried out
 - If high risk: same instructions as for adults in the general population;
 - If low risk: Managements will inform parents of the presence of a case of covid-19 in a class

The same message as for student index cases can be used:

"The PSE department has reported a positive case of Covid in your child's class. We urge you to monitor for symptoms for 14 days and not to visit vulnerable people, including grandparents, people over 65 years of age or people with chronic illnesses.

The school management informs the PSE team of adult cases, so that the team can have a complete overview of the situation within the school.

For your information, the HRC (high risk contact) measures :

	HRC not or partially vaccinated (adults and secondary school students)	HRC after full immunisation AND pupils in nursery and primary education)	HRC <180 days after previous infection
Quarantine	At least 7 days after contact if test within 72 hours of contact is negative If no test is performed, the quarantine period is 10 days	Release from quarantine on 1 ^{er} negative test result If no test is performed, the quarantine period is 10 days.	No quarantine
Test	1 ^{er} test as soon as possible after identification, within 72 hours. 2 ^e tests at D+7 after last high-risk contact Rigorous testing in case of symptoms	1 ^{er} test as soon as possible after identification 2 ^e tests at D+7 after last high-risk contact (even if the first test is negative) Rigorous testing in case of symptoms	Only in case of symptoms (no systematic testing to avoid false positives)
Social contacts	Avoid during quarantine + avoid risk groups until 14 days after high risk contact	Avoid risk groups for 14 days after high-risk contact	Avoid risk groups for 14 days after high-risk contact
Monitoring of the state of health	14 days	14 days	14 days

6. Class and school closures - reporting obligation

It is important to distinguish between a closure due to quarantine after the occurrence of a cluster, and an organisational closure due to a lack of teachers (themselves quarantined or unavailable for Covid-19 reasons).

In the first case, known as "health closure", the closure of the class or establishment is based on a decision or opinion of the PSE / CPMS-WBE service, the AVIQ or the COCOM, this will be the case of a closure based on the activation of the Emergency Break.

In the second case, known as 'organisational' closure, the PO can decide on a total or partial closure of the school because of the number of absent staff members and after having established that it is impossible to replace the staff members concerned. In the case of multiple class closures or total school closures, these can only be ordered after consultation with the local consultation bodies to establish that it is not possible to organise lessons.

With regard to **class or school closures**, reference should be made to the provisions of Article 1.9.1-4 of the Basic and Secondary Education Code, which remain applicable in the current health situation.

Partial or total closure of the school for the above-mentioned reasons may be considered as force majeure in accordance with the Education Code. Consequently, the recovery of lessons will not be required.

However, in these cases of closure, the Organising Authority or the school management shall formally ensure that:

- Notify the administration without delay using the electronic form provided at [https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=0rVWFO7QJUKRD7U-PzG21scb3uWn4GZEq3z_8RQ9noJURUJOOERBTU1OQTA0WkxUWjNDUjU3UDdVWi4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=0rVWFO7QJUKRD7U-PzG21scb3uWn4GZEq3z_8RQ9noJURUJOOERBTU1OQTA0WkxUWjNDUjU3UDdVWi4u;);
- Organise the continuation of distance learning where possible.

7. Summary table for the managements:

Case study	Starting point	Information for parents	Support for the PSE
A student is an index case	The management waits for the PSE team to contact them to inform him/her of the existence of the case.	The management sends the following message to all parents of the class concerned: <i>"The PSE department has reported a positive case of Covid in your child's class. We urge you to monitor for symptoms for 14 days and not to visit vulnerable people, including grandparents, people over 65 years old or people with chronic diseases chronic diseases".</i>	The management assists the PSE team to link the student to his/her class in order to maintain a system monitoring the number of cases within the classes and maintaining monitoring.
Emergency Break	The PSE implements the emergency break when there are 25% positive students in a class on the last 7 days (threshold adaptable for special education)	The PSE provides a signed letter to the management. This should be circulated to all parents of pupils in the class or school (if the whole school is to be closed).	The administration must be informed of the class or school closure via the electronic form provided for this purpose ⁴ .
A teacher is an index case	The occupational health service will contact the management	The management sends the following message to all parents of the class concerned:	The tracing of pupils and the tracing of staff members will be by the call centre, with the

⁴ https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=0rVWFO7QJUKRD7U-PzG21scb3uWn4GZEg3z_8RQ9noJURUJOOERBTU1OQTA0WkxUWjNDUjU3UDdVWw4u

		<p>"The PSE department has reported a positive case of Covid in your child's class. We urge you to monitor for symptoms for 14 days and not to visit vulnerable people, including grandparents, people over 65 years old or people with chronic diseases".</p> <p>High-risk contacts will be contacted by the call centre.</p>	<p>occupational medicine and the PSE team, with whom it will be appropriate to work on the monitoring of positive students.</p> <p>The management informs the PSE team of adult cases, so that the team can have a complete overview of the situation in the the school.</p>
<p>A parent informs the management of a case or asks questions about a case they have heard about</p>	<p>As long as the PSE team or the occupational medicine has not called, the management has not officially aware of the case.</p>	<p>The Management can tell the parent that "the case will be handled by the call centre and, once the PSE team has been informed of the situation, they will contact the management, who will inform the parents of the class concerned.</p>	<p>x</p>

NEW COVID CASE MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS FROM 16.11.2021



THE INDEX CASE IS IDENTIFIED

The parents/legal representative of the index case are contacted or he/she is contacted by the call centre.

The call centre will then start the search for high-risk contacts. A list of all contacts will be drawn up in all the student's living environments, including school.

To facilitate the exchange, you can prepare a list of the different contacts your child had in the days before the onset of symptoms or the last high-risk contact.

If the index case or its legal representative does not have access, at the time the call centre contacts it, to all the details of the high-risk contacts it identifies (first name, surname, telephone number), it can make an appointment with the call agent, who will call it back later, in order to provide all the details of the high-risk contacts or contact the call centre again later to complete its declaration, in accordance with the existing procedure.

If a student considers him/herself to be a high-risk contact and has not been identified as such, he/she should contact the index case. The index case can contact the call centre again to complete the list of high-risk contacts, in accordance with the existing procedure.

The call centre will provide test prescriptions and quarantine certificates.

01



THE CALL CENTRE ALSO CONTACTS THE SCHOOL'S PSE TEAM

The PSE team contacts the school to inform them (no action should be taken by the school before receiving the call from the PSE/CPMS-WBE) and, with the help of the school, links the pupil to his/her class in order to maintain a monitoring system of the number of cases within the schools and more specifically within the classes.

02



THE SCHOOL INFORMS PARENTS

The school administration will then inform the parents of the presence of a case of COVID-19 in a class, by the means of communication it deems most appropriate (via a note in the class newspaper, a letter binder, WhatsApp group, etc.)

The following note will be sent: "The PSE department has reported a positive case of Covid in your child's class. Please watch out for symptoms and do not visit vulnerable people, including grandparents, people over 65 or people with chronic illnesses, for 14 days.

It is important to respect the chain of information dissemination Call centre -> PSE team -> school management -> parents. Even if it is complicated and you have questions, the school management cannot answer them until they have been alerted by the PSE team. Information about a case can circulate quickly in the community, but it is important to let each intermediary work calmly, all cases will be treated.

03



AN "EMERGENCY BREAK" IS SET UP

An "emergency break" is put in place, allowing PSE teams to close the class at a certain contamination threshold (25% in mainstream education, at the discretion of the PSE in special education where classes are smaller).

04

At this point:

- The whole class is quarantined for 10 days, regardless of vaccination status, with the possibility of shortening the quarantine if a test is carried out at D7 and is negative;
- People on a recovery certificate must also complete the emergency break quarantine, but they can leave the quarantine at D8 without testing;
- The period of vigilance remains 14 days (protective measure for vulnerable people).

A letter signed by the PSE team is sent to the parents via the school management. The duration of the quarantine is calculated from the first day of school closure.

The letter will enable parents to make an appointment with a call centre and will help to justify the absence of the pupil in quarantine.