

Teachers and parents expose rising COVID infections in Australian schools

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The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) has been independently collating and tracking school closures since the beginning of Term 4, following the official reopening of schools in Victoria and New South Wales (NSW), Australia's two most populous states.

In just over five weeks over 500 schools in Victoria have either been closed or partially closed due to COVID infections with the numbers in NSW heading towards 300.

The full extent and overall data are not published by the state governments, the media or the unions—the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the New South Wales Teachers Federation (NSWTF)—which are complicit in this dangerous experiment. Many of the closed schools have been hit by multiple infections, the extent of which also remains undisclosed.

The refusal of public authorities to publish comprehensive accounts of COVID-related school closures is just one expression of the extraordinary censorship that has accompanied the reopening drive.

It was only after the CFPE began exposing the alarming infection numbers on social media, that the *Age* and *Guardian* newspapers and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation suddenly began highlighting some of the closures.

The CFPE is holding an online meeting this Saturday at 4 p.m. (AEDT), entitled “Oppose the dangerous reopening of schools in Australia! Form and join our rank-and-file action safety committees!” We urge all educators, parents, students and workers to attend the event, which will outline the experiences in the schools and a perspective to fight against the endangerment of teacher and child safety.

The CFPE has received correspondence from teachers and parents providing updates on school closure sites and explaining their stories. Teachers have requested their comments remain anonymous because they fear that speaking publicly could have implications for their employment. Parents have also requested that they not be named in case their children are targeted.

A secondary teacher from Melbourne, the Victorian state capital

One of my students, who I had taught that day, tested positive. I was given a set of official government criteria to decide for myself whether I was a “low risk,” “moderate risk” or “high risk” close contact. You are “low risk” if you are fully vaxxed, not “within immediate proximity” of the student in question, and in the same room as the student for not longer than 2 hours!!

We all know that it is virtually impossible to not at some stage be near almost every student in the room, in the course of most lessons. And 2 hours!! For a virus that transmits in seconds!!

There is no doubt that a gigantic social experiment is being played

out here. Today we read in the media that primary school children will most likely not be vaccinated until next year. So why are they being herded into classrooms, completely defenceless against the virus?

If teachers who are not fully vaccinated are not allowed to teach, how is it alright for children aged 5 to 11, and also many 12-to-16-year-olds, to be in packed classrooms?

The only conclusion, based on what I am observing at my school, and more broadly, is there is a deliberate attempt by governments to infect wide layers of the population, the ultimate consequences of which are totally unknown.

A parent from Melbourne's south-east

My daughter attends primary school. On the 30th of October the school sent out emails to everyone saying they had one case of COVID. On Tuesday they sent out another stating several students had tested positive. The next day another email stating that it continued to grow. Then I received a text saying a child in my daughter's class had tested positive. The school now has lots of cases but is still open.

I called the principal asking what they are doing to prevent cases. She told me the air purifiers are not being delivered until next April. With no fresh air schools haven't got any hope! I told her the kids should be outdoors more, she said that's up to the teacher.

I will not be sending my child back to school this year in these dangerous conditions. There are only a few weeks left, they just need to put them back online!

Another parent from Melbourne's south-east

We are keeping our 11-year-old home for now. Our vaccinated 13-year-old had their first day back yesterday and today. This morning they were in tears over concerns about bringing COVID home to their younger sibling.

I believe the primary school has many children positive, all of whom are from vulnerable and/or essential worker families, which of course puts already vulnerable kids at higher risk.

A specialist teacher in Melbourne

What is happening in our school is terrible. We deal with students who have severe and profound disabilities. Last year we worked on-site through all the lockdowns when mainstream schools were closed and not regarded as safe.

This week we had a student who was displaying symptoms of COVID. Students in that case are meant to isolate. We rang his parent and she said she couldn't pick him up. We are meant to have a designated area to isolate the student. We don't have that; he was left in the classroom the entire day displaying symptoms. We have been told this is what is going to continue to happen. Department guidelines are left up to local interpretation. Our staff members are so anxious.

A primary teacher in Melbourne's northern suburbs

There has been a case in the adjoining classroom with mine. The teacher shares an office with me where the doors open into both rooms. The Education Support (ES) staff member, who works in the adjoining room and has been listed as a close contact, also shares the office and comes in and out of my room regularly. The ES member is isolating but not me.

None of this was discussed with me, there was no special consideration, the school didn't check if the adjoining doors between the classes were open. Another child has now tested positive in that room.

All the staff are thinking, not if, but when will we have to deal with infections in our classroom. The government knows there will be more infections and are actively concealing this information. The unions are responsible for this situation too, they have done absolutely nothing to protect our safety but cover up the extent of infections and stifle any discussion among teachers.

A parent from New South Wales

Last year I was bullied by the attendance officer when they contacted me. I had to resort to requesting a medical certificate to cover the time it took for home schooling to approve my application. It was a very stressful time.

This year I hesitantly sent my kids to school with a strict mask regime. I have not returned them to school since the NSW lockdown. Again, I was very stressed as to how I was going to justify their absence. So far, I have not returned my kids to school and I am worried my hand will be forced, despite only half a term remaining.

It's interesting to see just how much more latitude private schools can offer parents who are reluctant to return their kids to school during a deadly pandemic.

A secondary teacher in Victoria

I have seen your posts on Facebook and I am a teacher and agree entirely with what you are saying about the opening of schools, however can't say anything publicly... but the data shown and the assumed data behind that also doesn't paint the full picture.

Even at our school (high school) we have had NUMEROUS cases of COVID within the school... many of which have been at school whilst infectious, however, the school is NOT partially isolating classes (even though they spend 2 hours and more together AND other kids in the same class have since tested positive, AND their siblings are still being sent to school), teachers and their classmates as well as parents are not informed if a student in their class has COVID. "It looks bad if the school shuts down"... just letting you know.

A secondary teacher from Melbourne's western suburbs

In 2020 positive cases always meant an extended period of online learning. This year it has been different with only one day given to carry out contact tracing, and cleaning. School administrations are under pressure from the Department to remain open and make a decision on whether closure is necessary.

Students are still in the process of completing their final VCE exams. Many are extremely concerned and stressed that a friend or a loved one may have what could be a deadly disease! They are then expected to do an exam that is meant to determine their future? Unbelievably we are told the government is very concerned about the mental health of students?

A teacher from NSW

My school was closed last week due to COVID and is closed again tomorrow. We were told to watch for emails—they knew this morning but we still were expected to teach all day.

A teacher from last week was told she didn't need to isolate even though her students do. The same with the librarian and music teacher. In one class only half the class are considered close contacts and are isolating. How on earth did they come to that conclusion? Siblings aren't isolating either.

How is this safe? Not one teacher who spent any time with them, not even the class teacher who spends all day, was told to isolate. I'm immunised but I'm angry, we are being put at risk.

A parent from regional Victoria

I am so frustrated by the media's constant whitewashing of this issue and complete refusal to focus on the concerns expressed by OzSAGE and other public health experts.

I am particularly shocked by the information being provided by the Murdoch Institute, Royal Children's Hospital. These are highly esteemed organisations with a vital role to play in informing and educating the public, and advocating for children's health, but are instead perpetuating the line that COVID is safe in kids, when indeed there is much evidence to indicate otherwise. Why would we even take the chance given how close we are to a vaccine program for kids?

As a parent of unvaccinated under 12s attending school in regional Victoria, this greatly concerns me as I have no way of attempting to judge how prevalent COVID is in our local schools, which is vital information that I use in assisting me to decide whether or not to permit my children to attend school each day. With schools no longer listed as exposure sites, is there any other way that we can access information regarding which schools currently have COVID cases??

With no remote learning options provided, I feel tortured making the daily decision whether or not to allow my children to access education (which they are desperate to do!), or keep them at home to avoid the risk of exposing them to a potentially serious disease with unknown long-term consequences.

Our school has no CO2 detectors, no air filtration systems, no classes conducted outdoors and the only external door to my child's classroom is currently broken and the windows do not open, so there is no external ventilation. I find this situation terrifying. Children have the right to receive education in a safe environment and this is clearly not an option at this present time.

Register here for the CFPE meeting this Saturday and promote it among teachers, students, colleagues and friends! The CFPE encourages educators, parents and students to contact us, share your experiences and help break the government-media conspiracy of silence over what is taking place in schools:

Email: cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

Twitter: @CFPE_Australia



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact