

Australian state government internal report details spread of COVID infections in schools

Frank Gaglioti
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The science magazine *Cosmos* recently published internal Department of Health documents from the state of Victoria in early 2022, which it received via a freedom of information request.

The previously secret documents make clear that the Victorian Labor government of Premier Daniel Andrews had precise data on the upsurge of COVID-19 infections that followed its forced reopening of the schools in late January and early February of 2022. It knew that promises that the schools were not vectors of infection spread were false, yet kept this information under wraps.

This was part of a coordinated operation—carried out by the state Labor government in collaboration with its Liberal-National counterparts in New South Wales and federally—driven by the goal of getting workers back to their workplaces and ending all public health measures that impinged on corporate profiteering.

One of the documents secured by *Cosmos* was a 101-page Department of Health report that was issued April 1, 2022, and titled “COVID Screening in Schools: Weekly data to evaluate the uptake, effectiveness, and acceptability of RATs [rapid antigen tests].” It was also marked “Report #6, Final Term 1 Report,” indicating that the state government had access to schools’ infection data updated at least fortnightly.

The information was considered extremely sensitive, with each page marked in red bold lettering, “OFFICIAL: Sensitive.” A similar freedom of information request in New South Wales by COVID Safe Schools, a social media group of concerned parents, teachers, and community members, was recently rejected.

The Victorian report consisted of a week-by-week analysis of COVID infections in schools during the first term of school during February and March, as well as over the two-week term break and the first two weeks of the second term. The government’s figures showed that as soon as schools were reopened, infections skyrocketed.

During Term 1 there were 154,169 cases reported for those under 18 years, of which 81 percent were symptomatic.

While primary aged children were 12.3 per ten thousand. The non-school aged population was 8.9 per ten thousand for pre-school children and 12.3 per ten thousand for adults. The report concluded that “School-aged children remain a cohort that has a significantly higher case rate than the adult population, and therefore comprise a large proportion (36.2%) of the total cases in Victoria.”

The most damning statistics in the internal report were that infection rates declined for the two-week period of the term holidays, underscoring that the school environment considerably heightened the risk of infection.

Infection numbers in the last week of Term 1 was 14,734 for school aged children. This declined to 9,485 in the first week of the holidays and again to 7,312 in the second week. As soon as school went back, infection numbers surged, with 9,260 in the first week of term and 13,289 in the second week.

The Victorian statistics collected were mostly collected from parents carrying out rapid antigen tests (RATs) on their children, as well as some polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests.

The schools’ reopening in early 2022 marked the first time in Australia that face to face teaching had been insisted on amid widespread community transmission of COVID. It was pushed through in the face of widespread opposition among teachers and families, and despite grossly inadequate protection measures being in place, including few air filtration devices in classrooms and only a minority of children having received even a single dose of the vaccine.

As infections surged when the schools reopened, precise data was suppressed from public scrutiny. The Victorian Labor education minister James Merlino responded to

publicly available reports of more than a hundred school outbreaks in a day, not as though it were a calamity but rather as if all was going to plan. “We know that there will be an increase, as you have a million students going back at school with all the teachers and all the staff,” he proclaimed.

The report proved the government was fully aware of the adverse consequences of the reopening but continued, nevertheless, because it was determined to subordinate the health of students and the school community to big business interests. In week five of the first term, mask mandates were further loosened in schools, with wearing of masks no longer compulsory for most students. At the beginning of Term 2, the mask mandate was dropped for all students.

Department of Health data secured by *Cosmos* indicated that removing mask mandates increased COVID transmission in schools by 23 percent, an entirely predictable result.

The government report attempted to justify the government’s program, stating that the high infection rates were due to the heightened infectivity of the Omicron variant. It predicted a surge in cases due to the emergence of the highly transmissible BA.2 variant. However it failed to explain why rates remained higher in schools than the rest of the state for the period data was collected. The department justified the alarming infection rates by peddling the lie that Omicron is not very dangerous for children.

Reputable epidemiologists consider there is no such thing as a “mild” case of COVID for anyone. The disease can have very severe long-term consequences on all body systems such as the respiratory, cardiovascular and nervous systems.

A study published in January 2023 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* shows that COVID-19 is a leading cause of death among children ages 0-19 in the United States. As well, the disease is a leading cause of death within each age group, ranking seventh among ages less than one and ages one to four; sixth among children ages five to nine and 10 to 14; and fifth among those ages 15-19.

The reopening of schools was only able to occur due to the complicity of the Australian Education Union (AEU), which marched in lockstep with the Andrews government.

The AEU raised no objections to the reopening of schools and refused to demand that the government publish infection rates in schools. In opposition to this conspiracy of silence, the Committee for Public Education

(CFPE), a rank-and-file committee made up of educators and parents, published infection rates in 2022 using data from the limited sources still available.

On January 25, just days before schools reopened the CFPE published a statement titled “COVID disaster set to hit Australia’s schools—Build rank and file committees! Prepare strike action to halt infection and death!”

It stated, “Federal and state governments, Labor and Liberal, backed by the Australian Education Union and its affiliates, have prepared a program of mass infection, disease, and death. Authorities know full well what is set to emerge, with federal and state chief medical officers admitting in recent days that reopening the schools will trigger clusters of infection and increase overall case numbers.”

The duplicity of the AEU was made patently clear when federal union secretary Kevin Bates gave testimony on 20 February this year to a Senate “Inquiry into Long COVID and Repeated COVID Infections.” He admitted that Long COVID had a “significant impact on the health and safety of AEU members across the country and potentially hundreds of thousands of school students have also been impacted.” He acknowledged that “our members... have experienced COVID infections multiple times, in some cases four and five repeated infections.”

Recent research has shown that with each COVID infection the probability of contracting Long COVID increases.

When asked if a survey of teachers could be done to determine the impact of Long COVID on teachers, Bates said there was a “potential for that to be done” but then ruled it out as a possibility, citing concerns over “workloads.”



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