

Airflow and ventilation in schools

Ventilation

Ventilation in schools has been one of the mitigation strategies identified for returning to school to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Currently, all fixed plant school air-conditioning systems in Northern Territory Government schools meet or exceed relevant Australian Standards for fresh air intake and circulation. However, as a precautionary measure, the department has coordinated contractors to adjust existing fixed plant school air-conditioning systems to maximise airflow and ventilation.

In addition, 500 new air purification devices will be delivered to 77 Territory schools. These schools have been identified as schools that do not have access to any areas with central mechanical plant air-conditioning systems.

The increase in air flow and use of air purifiers will not eliminate COVID-19 transmission risks but, combined with other interventions in schools – including vaccination, physical distancing, good hygiene, masks and cleaning – will create a safer school environment.

Central plant air conditioning

If your school has central mechanical plant air-conditioning, this will be adjusted to ensure maximum airflow and ventilation. This is a whole of agency approach for all schools with central air conditioning and school staff must allow contractors access to make the required adjustments. Concerns should be directed to your Director Quality School Systems and Support (QSSS) following completion of the adjustments by the period contractor.

Increasing air flows will, in some cases, see slightly higher temperatures than previous settings through the increasing of fresh air directly into classrooms and shared spaces. This is a temporary measure only for an initial period at the beginning of the school year. In situations where this adjustment leads to an unacceptable level of discomfort within learning environments, a further adjustment can be provided to reach a suitable level for both fresh air and temperature to be supported. All requests for adjustments should be submitted to the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Logistics through the usual UMR contact for your region; however, please note the current focus is on completing air flow increases for all schools as a priority, before returning to adjust already increased systems. Please work with your Director QSSS on ways you may need to adjust your operations until period contractors are available to attend to consider further flow adjustment requests.

The increase in airflow will also see an impact on your operational costs – electricity usage will increase as plants will be working harder and, in some cases, longer. There will be no detriment to schools as a result of this change and support to respond to any increased costs incurred will be communicated in the coming weeks.

Reducing COVID-19 transmission in schools can be achieved through adapting the use of school spaces including maximising the use of outdoor learning areas, maximising ventilation of indoor spaces and minimising the use of spaces that can't be ventilated with fresh air.

Please see attached a [fact sheet](#) and the [user manual](#) which will provide more information on how schools can reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission through using outdoor school spaces and ventilating indoor school spaces.

Air purifiers

If your school is identified for air purifiers, please ensure they are placed in an appropriate position and plugged into the wall of your classroom/s. You need to place two purifiers in each classroom to ensure sufficient airflow. Please note in the [highest mode](#) (54dB) the noise **might** be noticeable in classrooms. It will depend on what other noise sources are in the room (such as lights, fans, fridges, air cons, servers and data projectors), the reverberation of the room and what activities are being conducted (e.g. explicit teaching and working noise from children). The impact of the noise created by the air purifier/s will be more noticeable in classrooms that echo (i.e. have a high level of reverberation). This should be a consideration when thinking about the most appropriate position for the unit in these settings.

Schools may need to adjust classroom operations to accommodate the number of air purifiers. The department will work with you following the initial distribution to identify if further units are required. The number of air purifiers to be distributed has taken into account school enrolment and attendance numbers and the number of portable units currently available to the department. Please advise if you require additional purifiers. We may need assistance to get the initial delivery of purifiers out to your school; please advise if you have suggestions for transport/delivery.

The use of air purifiers will not eliminate COVID-19 transmission risks but, combined with other interventions in schools – including vaccination, physical distancing, and good hygiene and cleaning – will create a safer school environment.