



COOK ISLANDS
Ministry of Education
Maraurau o te Pae Api'i

MARAURAU O TE PAE API'I | MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
MEDIA RELEASE

1st February 2022

Following the announcement in New Zealand of community transmission of the Omicron COVID-19 variant, the Cook Islands Cabinet approved additional public health measures including the extension of the school holiday period for all schools for a further two weeks.

The safe reopening of schools has been in constant review, and having met with the Secretary of Health, the Ministry of Education is excited to welcome back students and teachers to school, when learning commences on Monday 7th February 2022 (CKT).

During discussions with Te Marae Ora this week however, it was recommended that all schools (early childhood, primary and secondary) on the island of Aitutaki remain closed for at least a further three days. The delayed arrival of the Pfizer vaccine into the country for the 5-11 year olds has impacted the successful completion of the vaccination schedule. As Rarotonga and Aitutaki are in one bubble, these two islands have been prioritised first before the opening of school. The vaccination round for Rarotonga will be completed before Monday 7th February and therefore all Rarotonga schools can safely open but the delayed opening of learning on Aitutaki will ensure their timely completion of the vaccination schedule between the hours of 8am – 3pm. The Ministry of Education encourages families to seek reliable information and discuss with health professionals in their community the benefits of vaccination to members of their family.

The current travel restrictions and requirements for the rest of the Pa Enua further ensures that schools in our Pa Enua can reopen from Monday 7th February safely.

Further extending precautionary measures for the Cook Islands is in response to the changing COVID-19 landscape in New Zealand, and means our students, their families, and staff across all our education premises can have confidence that all measures are being taken to keep them safe and well informed.

Focussing on learning continuity and operating safely remains the goal for delivering learning at our schools and providers during this time. Taking our lead from Te Marae Ora, many will see the same public health measures within our community translated across to our schools, providers and classrooms.

“Schools have been doing an amazing job incorporating the public health measures into the context of school. This extra time as a result of the extended school holiday period has given schools the space to open with confidence next week and in knowing their established measures will be keeping everyone safe,” says Secretary of Education Danielle Cochrane.

“Schools remain a safe place to be for our students, teachers and staff. Learning continues, our students have the opportunity to engage with their friends and peers, and school also helps reduce stress on families. The public health guidelines that keep us safe in the community are keeping us all safe at school,” adds the Secretary of Education.

When visiting our educational facilities, you will see that all adults and those over the age of 18 years will be wearing face masks, including our teachers and those delivering learning in the classroom. The Ministry of Education kindly ask that the same mask wearing expectation is given when visiting our schools, if an actual visit is necessary. Schools also remain fully equipped with CookSafe tagging capabilities including manual record, and hand sanitizers, so visitors can continue with the health measures within our community at school.

Increased handwashing and hygiene practices are our new learning norms and understandably these have been strengthened recently in preparation for the reopening of schools. Along with fresh stationary supplies schools will be receiving this week a consignment of face masks and cleaning products to bolster health measures and to allow for increased and regular cleaning of shared spaces, surfaces and equipment. Distancing in school is clearly trickier than in other spaces in our community, but teachers and staff are extremely creative and will be utilising outside spaces and innovative teaching techniques when delivering to groups of students. This being particularly important for our littlest learners, those younger than 5 years old and those unable to be vaccinated at this time.

Parents, caregivers and families can be assured that health, wellbeing and hygiene is central to learning and our schools are doing everything they can to be clean, distanced and safe while meeting students learning needs.

The Ministry of Education and schools will continue to work closely with Te Marae Ora, our Puna and respective Island Governments. We extend our appreciation to all families and our partners in education across both the private and public sectors for helping make the start of this 2022 academic year a successful one. Together, we look forward to welcoming our students, ready and prepared for learning.

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For all media enquiries, contact Secretary of Education, Ms. Danielle Tungane Cochrane - secretary@education.gov.ck