



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **the Premier and Cabinet**



Hon. Mark McGowan MLA
Premier



Hon. Roger Cook MLA
Minister for Health



Hon. Sue Ellery MLC
Minister for Education and
Training

MEDIA STATEMENT

Friday, 1 May 2020

Research study to track impact of COVID-19 in schools

- Thousands of staff and students from WA schools invited to participate
- 80 public schools, education support centres and residential colleges participating
- Study to test for COVID-19 in schools and psychosocial impacts of the virus
- Research forms part of the DETECT program – a new WA based population study focused on testing targeted groups of people who do not have COVID-19 symptoms

The McGowan Government is partnering with the Telethon Kids Institute in a study to test for COVID-19 among school students and staff without symptoms.

The school project forms part of the DETECT program, a McGowan Government initiative which brought together some of WA's leading researchers and asked them to design a population study to examine the prevalence of COVID-19 on key sectors of our community.

The study involving schools, will also provide a greater certainty around possible transmission of the disease in schools.

Following schools, it is anticipated FIFO workers and frontline healthcare workers will be incorporated into the DETECT program which will see randomised testing of people who do not have COVID-19 symptoms.

While there is currently no evidence of community spread and schools are considered low risk environments, it's hoped the DETECT study will assist in developing an even stronger evidence base on which to make policy decisions.

Eighty public schools, education support centres, and residential colleges from the metropolitan area and the regional WA will initially participate. The participating schools reflect a range of socio-economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. See the complete list here: www.education.wa.edu.au/covid-19-research-study.

Participation is voluntary and requires the consent of staff, and by parents on behalf of their child or children.

The study has three aspects, the first is a surveillance study in which a sample of staff and students from forty identified schools will be tested for COVID-19 at monthly intervals over a period of three months, possibly longer depending on the number of cases detected. Parents will be advised of the outcome of tests.

The response to positive tests will vary slightly from the usual public health response and this forms the second aspect of the study.

Contact tracing by the Department of Health will require any student or staff member who tests positive to COVID-19, along with their close contacts, to self-isolate as normal. However, all close contacts will undergo multiple tests for COVID-19 at intervals over two weeks irrespective of whether they show symptoms.

They would also keep a symptom diary for that period.

The intent of the more comprehensive response to a positive test is to identify any onward transmission from the index case and provide a greater understanding of the role schools play in the transmissibility of COVID-19 between students and staff, and the wider community via household members and other non-school contacts.

The final component of the study relates to the psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 among students, their parents and teachers.

Through a series of 15-minute surveys, students of various age groups, parents and teachers will provide information on how COVID-19 is impacting their physical, social and emotional wellbeing.

It's hoped that by identifying risks factors, protective measures may be rapidly implemented in schools to meet their needs.

The study is a partnership between the Departments of Health and Education with the Telethon Kids Institute and is expected to begin in mid-May.

A demonstration of the swab testing in children can be viewed here: <https://tichr.sharefile.com/d-s21f92ebda80475ca>.

Comments attributed to Premier Mark McGowan:

“Our State COVID-19 numbers continue to very encouraging but we cannot be complacent.

“While we have taken swift action to avoid community spread, we continue to take further steps to protect Western Australians and we will keep learning more about this virus.

“This is why I previously announced we would further expand COVID-19 testing as part of a research project for priority groups.

“This new study in collaboration with some of the State’s best researchers allows us introduce a random spot check testing system in schools and other priority settings.”

Comments attributed to Health Minister Roger Cook:

“All available evidence indicates that schools are safe and our commitment to this study should provide the community with further reassurance that we are taking reasonable steps to detect any undiagnosed COVID-19 and better understand how schools are impacted by the virus.

“Testing people who do not have COVID symptoms from some of our key community sectors will help us better understand the health and economic impacts of this devastating virus.

“The team involved in the DETECT program come from a range of leading medical research institutes in WA, brought together by WA Health, I thank them for their efforts and I am confident this research study will provide vital insights to assist us in our ongoing battle with COVID-19.

“This study is in addition to a \$3 million commitment to COVID-19 related health and medical research projects, an indication of the McGowan Government’s commitment to tackling this virus on all fronts.”

Comments attributed to Education Minister Sue Ellery:

“Until now we have had no student to student or student to teacher transmission of COVID-19 and we want this to continue.

“However this study will play an important role in establishing whether asymptomatic transmission may occur and which groups may be at greater risk.

“I am particularly pleased that the study will also consider the psychosocial impacts as the mental wellbeing of our school community is just as important as physical wellbeing.

“We want to understand how COVID-19 is affecting our teachers, school staff and students – both inside and outside the classroom – so we can ensure the appropriate support measures are available.”