



12 October 2021

## Recommendations of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Culture for universities, universities of applied sciences and providers of general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, liberal adult education and basic education for adults during the coronavirus epidemic

- **These recommendations replace the recommendations issued on 5 August 2021.**

In accordance with the Government Resolution of 9 September 2021, the system of epidemiologically classifying regions into different phases will be discontinued and a uniform system based on local level activities will be adopted throughout the country. The epidemiological situation will be monitored. If regional clusters of infection emerge, they will primarily be managed in a targeted way by local authorities in line with the basic powers laid down in the Communicable Diseases Act.

The temporary provisions of the Communicable Diseases Act on measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic will remain in force until 31 December 2021.

### Legal bases and competences

Under section 8 of the Communicable Diseases Act (1227/2016), the regional state administrative agencies coordinate and supervise the prevention of infections in their area. The joint municipal authorities for hospital districts guide and support municipalities as well as healthcare and social welfare units in the prevention of communicable diseases, work regionally to develop the diagnostics and treatment of communicable diseases, and investigate epidemics together with municipalities. The regional state administrative agencies and the joint municipal authorities for hospital districts within each agency's operating area collaborate in the prevention of communicable diseases. The regional state administrative agencies make the administrative decisions laid down in this Act by making use of the expertise of the

joint municipal authority of the hospital district, the specific catchment area, and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.

Under section 9 of the Communicable Diseases Act, municipalities are responsible for organising the work to prevent communicable diseases referred to in this Act within their area as part of public health work, as laid down in the Primary Health Care Act (66/1972), in the Health Care Act (1326/2010) and in this Act. In this Act, the actions to prevent communicable diseases encompass the prevention, early detection and monitoring of communicable diseases, measures needed to investigate or prevent an epidemic, and the examination, treatment and medical rehabilitation of persons who have a communicable disease or are suspected of having one, as well as the prevention of treatment-related infections.

Under section 58, subsection 1 of the Communicable Diseases Act, the municipal body responsible for controlling infectious diseases may, within its area of operation, decide to close healthcare and social welfare units, educational institutions, early education centres, residential accommodation and similar facilities and prohibit public gatherings or public events when a generally hazardous infectious disease or a disease that is justifiably suspected of being generally hazardous has been diagnosed or is justifiably expected to occur. A further condition is that such measures are necessary to prevent the spread of a generally hazardous infectious disease or a disease that is justifiably suspected of being generally hazardous. The regional state administrative agencies may make similar decisions in their operating area, when the decisions are needed for an area covering several municipalities.

In principle, the general restrictions on gatherings do not apply to teaching and other statutory activities of educational institutions. The recommendations of the Government on the restrictions in force on gatherings and the decisions of the regional state administrative agencies regarding public events in accordance with the Communicable Diseases Act must be complied with at public events organised by educational institutions.

## **Obligations under the Communicable Diseases Act to prevent the coronavirus epidemic from spreading**

The temporary amendments to the Communicable Diseases Act (447/2021) entered into force on 1 July 2021. The amendments will remain in force until 31 December 2021.

Section 58c of the Communicable Diseases Act also places obligations on education providers. Section 58c of the Communicable Diseases Act consists of provisions on the obligations to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the activities of those defined in the Act. The obligations are directly in force under the Act and do not require a separate decision by the authorities. Obligations under the section include the obligation to make sure:

- those working in educational institutions are given opportunities to clean their hands;
- those in educational institutions are given instructions on how to keep an adequate distance, hand hygiene practices and other similar practices to prevent the spread of infections;
- to organise more intensive cleaning of the premises and surfaces in addition to provisions issued elsewhere on cleanliness related to the activities in question; and
- those in educational institutions use the premises in a spacious way, taking into account the specific characteristics of the activity in question, and any customer seating is arranged sufficiently far apart.

The guidelines for action can be executed in the most expedient way, for example by means of public announcements, written instructions, signposting, signs indicating how to use in premises, or any other effective ways.

Under the Communicable Diseases Act, each regional state administrative agency and municipality monitors compliance with the COVID-19 obligations and restrictions and relevant decisions in their respective areas. The regional state administrative agencies and municipalities may inspect the activities of the operators they supervise and the premises used in their operations and stipulate measures to remedy shortcomings and drawbacks.

In the case of activities organised by education providers, those responsible for managing the premises are also responsible for giving guidance and opportunities for hand washing for those using the premises in the evenings and at the weekend. Guidance should be given on keeping safe distances, hand cleaning practices and other practices to prevent the spread of infections. If the activities are ones of an external operator organising activities under a lease agreement with the service provider, the the provider and the lessee can agree between themselves how to implement the obligations governed by section 58c of the Communicable Diseases Act. The operator of the actual activities is responsible for ensuring that the obligations are properly implemented. The responsibilities of educational institutions do not extend to facilities available to or leased to other operators, such as student organisations, student unions and student associations, and student canteens.

## **Purpose of the recommendations**

The purpose of these recommendations is to support universities and universities of applied sciences as well as providers of general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, liberal adult education and basic education for adults to carry out teaching and other activities organised in the premises of educational institutions safely during the COVID-19 epidemic. By following the recommendations, the risk of infection can be reduced in educational institutions.

## **Do not take part in instruction and other activities organised in educational institutions if you have symptoms of illness**

Coronavirus causes a respiratory infection. The symptoms may include a cough, sore throat, fever, shortness of breath (dyspnoea), muscle pain (myalgia), abdominal symptoms and headache.

If a student or teacher has any symptoms of illness, they must not participate in contact teaching or other activities organised on the premises of an educational institution. Nor must others working in or visiting the premises of an educational institution enter the premises of an educational institution if they have any symptoms of illness. Anyone who becomes ill during the day must leave the educational institution immediately or move to a separate space.

[Instructions on how to apply for a coronavirus test are available on the website of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.](#)

If a student living in the dormitory of an educational institution becomes ill, the institution may contact, where necessary, the unit responsible for communicable diseases in the municipality of the educational institution in order to evaluate the situation and to assess what measures are necessary.

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: [Symptoms and treatment](#)

## **Risk groups**

It is particularly important for those at risk to take care of their vaccination coverage. Two doses of vaccine provide excellent protection against a severe form of coronavirus.

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: [Risk groups for severe coronavirus disease](#)

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: [Vaccines and coronavirus](#)

For those working in educational institutions, the measures are based on a risk assessment carried out by the employer. Occupational healthcare supports employers in the risk assessment.

## **Ensure sufficient distancing**

The coronavirus is mainly transmitted by respiratory droplets. Situations in which people are in direct contact with one another should be avoided in educational institutions (section 58c, subsection 2 of the Communicable Diseases Act). If necessary, the education provider and the unit responsible for communicable diseases in the municipality where the educational institution is located can provide further guidance on practical measures.

Lectures for a large number of participants may be organised on condition proper distancing is ensured. Remote connections can still be used when organising such events.

When people other than students and staff are present in educational institutions, they must be instructed to follow the guidelines on hygiene and respecting distancing.

Monitoring has shown that the risk of infection associated with contact teaching has been low, and there is no need to give general recommendations on masks to the education sector. The competent authorities in the regions and local areas may issue supplementary or more limited recommendations in their area or locally based on their risk assessment and powers, taking into account the local and regional epidemiological situation. Under the legislative acts governing their activities, education providers are responsible for the safety of the learning environment and, for this purpose, may issue their own recommendations on the use of masks in facilities where teaching and examinations take place. For this reason, more specific recommendations on the use of masks in educational institutions may vary by region.

For example, student canteens or other eating areas can be used in turns to avoid unnecessary close contact and keep sufficient distancing. Proper hygiene should be ensured when preparing and distributing food as well as during meals.

Students can live in shared rooms in dormitories connected to educational institutions. The educational institutions should keep records of each person who has used their accommodation on a room-by-room basis so that infections can be traced later, if necessary.

[Guidelines for workplaces to prevent coronavirus infection](#)

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: [Transmission and incubation period of coronavirus](#)

## **Good hand hygiene and respiratory and cough hygiene prevents infections**

Proper hand hygiene and respiratory and cough practices prevent infections. To raise awareness, it is recommended that information material on the right practices be distributed to those working and studying at educational institutions.

- When in an educational institution, it is recommended you wash your hands whenever you come in after you have been out, before meals, always after sneezing or coughing, or if your hands are visibly dirty. Use disposable paper towels to dry your hands.
- If you cannot wash your hands, you can use an alcohol-based sanitiser. Hand sanitisers should be readily available.

- When sneezing or coughing, place a disposable handkerchief to cover your mouth and dispose of it immediately after use. If you do not have a handkerchief, cover your mouth with your upper arm near your inner elbow. Then wash your hands.
- [Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: Hand washing and coughing](#)

## Cleaning and ventilation

Coronavirus is primarily transmitted as a droplet and contact infection when a person coughs or sneezes. It is possible to catch the coronavirus via small airborne aerosols in indoor spaces where ventilation is poor. It is possible that the virus might also be transmitted through physical contact. Coronaviruses do not survive for long periods in the air or on surfaces of varying temperatures. Slightly alkaline all-purpose cleaners should be used when cleaning. You can use disinfectant to step up cleaning in sanitary facilities. Comply with the guidelines on cleaning issued by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.

- Wipe contact surfaces such as door handles, armrests, desks and tables, light switches and taps at least once a day, preferably twice a day.
- It is recommended that shared work or study equipment always be wiped clean after use between users.
- Finnish Institute of Occupational Health: [Cleaning guidelines](#)
- Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: [Separate guidelines on ventilation](#)

## If a coronavirus infection is diagnosed in an educational institution

Under the Communicable Diseases Act, a physician responsible for communicable diseases in the municipality or hospital district is in charge of investigating transmission chains. If a student or a person working in an educational institution is diagnosed with COVID-19, action will be taken to examine whether an exposure has occurred. Those who might possibly have been exposed to it are traced and, by virtue of the Communicable Diseases Act, quarantined. Based on the instructions given by a physician specialised in communicable diseases, those infected with COVID-19 must therefore stay away from the educational institution.

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: [Instructions for coronavirus exposure situations in early childhood education and care, schools and educational institutions](#) (in Finnish or Swedish)