

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

Information regarding Youth Justice operations (3 April 2020)

Youth Justice is continuing to supervise children and young people in custody and the community and taking active measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19. This information outlines current practices and will be reviewed in line with current medical advice from Victoria's Chief Health Officer and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Custodial operations

Custodial facilities are fully operational

Youth Justice is continuing to operate its custodial facilities at the Parkville and Malmsbury precincts. Both precincts remain fully operational. This includes continuing to meet children's and young people's developmental needs, including education, programs and rehabilitation services.

Specific COVID-19 processes are in place to manage the risk of transmission in custody

Youth Justice has well-established procedures in place for managing communicable diseases in its custodial precincts. Additional specific procedures to manage the risk of COVID-19 have been developed, including screening procedures and temperature testing all young people entering Youth Justice.

Youth Justice has also developed a management plan to anticipate and respond to any impacts of COVID-19 in custody over the coming months. Other measures to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 are outlined below.

Placement decisions continue to be made according to existing procedures

Decisions about where to place young people in custodial facilities continue to be made by Youth Justice in accordance with standard operating procedures.

Continuous standing lockdowns are not in place, and placement decisions continue to be made in line with current health advice, relevant legal requirements and human rights. Any change to

the placement of a child or young person for reasons related to COVID-19 will be made on a similar basis.

Plans are in place for the management of suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Youth Justice has a management plan in place for the continued care of a young person if they are suspected to have or confirmed to have COVID-19, and the care of any young person who has come into contact with that young person. This plan reflects current health advice.

In limited circumstances, it may be necessary to reduce the contact a young person has with other young people, to minimise any risk of infection spreading. This may sometimes require a young person to spend additional time in their bedroom. In this case:

- It will be for the minimum amount of time in line with current health advice
- Consideration will be given to the need to eliminate or reduce serious risks to public health, as well as the security of the facility, and the safety of all children, young people, staff and the community
- Arrangements will be in place to continue to meet young people's educational and developmental needs.

Youth Justice is also accelerating the delivery of new infrastructure to provide more capacity to respond to any future impacts of COVID-19 on its custodial operations.

Technological solutions are in place to respond to COVID-19

In response to the risk of COVID-19, Youth Justice has put in place arrangements and technology to facilitate:

- the ongoing delivery of case management and education
- children and young people having access to entertainment through secure tablet devices
- the delivery of medical and mental health checks, and treatment as needed
- visits between the young person and their family and significant others
- access to cultural supports.

Arrangements for the future delivery of education are being considered in consultation with Parkville College and the Department of Education and Training, in line with advice from government.

Mitigating the risk of transmission

To further mitigate the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in custodial facilities, a number of precautionary measures have been taken, as follows.

Suspension of personal visits

Personal visits to Victorian youth justice precincts are currently suspended due to reduce the risk of COVID-19. Personal visits for compassionate reasons or in exceptional circumstances are being considered on a case by case basis, subject to approval by the precinct General Manager.

Personal visits for young people are now being facilitated over Skype, using tablet devices in both youth justice precincts. Additional arrangements are being considered for personal visitors who do not have access to the necessary technology.

Young people are also entitled to an additional two free phone calls per week.

Permitting only essential professional visits

Professional visits are also limited to essential visits only. Precinct Management is assessing each visit request to determine if it is essential

and if it is in the best interests of the young person. Examples of essential visits include:

- bail assessments
- court-ordered assessments
- the delivery of critical information
- visits by legal representatives that cannot be conducted remotely.

Youth Justice is working with professional visitors to make alternative arrangements if their visit is assessed as non-essential. Alternative arrangements include:

- facilitating a telephone call with the young person
- facilitating a remote visit with the assistance of technology, such as a tablet device
- having a Youth Justice staff member (e.g. Case Manager, Unit Manager) deliver important information to the young person on their unit.

Restrictions on entry do not apply to non-DJCS staff who regularly work inside Youth Justice Precincts, including:

- Parkville College
- Health service providers, including mental health care providers
- Chaplaincy services.

Contractors conducting essential maintenance or construction work are still permitted to enter.

Screening all visitors and staff

All essential professional and contract visitors continuing to attend in person are subject to screening questions for COVID-19 risk when they:

- call to book a visit
- present at a Youth Justice custodial precinct.

Screening questions are based on current medical advice from Victoria's Chief Health Officer and DHHS. If a visitor fails the screening process, they are not allowed to enter the Youth Justice Precinct and are asked to leave.

The precinct General Manager retains discretion to allow visits or arrange alternative

visits – based on an assessment of risk and the best interests of the young person.

All staff are asked the screening questions on arrival for work and, if they answer 'yes' to any of the screening questions, are not permitted entry to the precinct. Staff who answer 'yes' to any screening question are instructed to go home immediately and contact their GP or the DHHS dedicated COVID-19 advice hotline.

Implementing safety, hygiene and personal protective equipment protocols

Physical distancing protocols and personal hygiene instructions are in place across both custodial precincts. If a child or young person is suspected of or confirmed as having COVID-19, processes are in place with Justice Health to appropriately manage risks to health. These include the use of personal protective equipment (for example, masks and gloves) to control transmission risks.

Suspending temporary leave

Most temporary leave arrangements for young people are suspended to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Temporary leave for medical and compassionate purposes remains under review on a case by case basis, on the approval of the Director, Custodial Operations.

Community services

Community services are continuing

Youth Justice is continuing to supervise young people who are subject to community-based orders. This includes ongoing supervision of young people who are on:

- Supervised deferral of their sentence
- Supervised and supervised intensive bail
- Community based orders, namely Probation, Youth Supervision Order, Youth Attendance Order, Youth Control Order
- Youth Parole Order.

While community-based supervision is continuing, given the need to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19, the mode of supervision has changed. This will continue to be regularly assessed in line with current health

advice. Should further changes be required to community supervision arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic, Youth Justice will provide further information about how that will be managed and prioritised.

The Children's Court Youth Diversion service is also continuing to be supported.

Supervision will be conducted remotely in most cases

To mitigate the risk of transmission of COVID-19, Youth Justice has moved to supervising young people remotely with the assistance of technology (e.g. via Skype). This involves case managers working from home and engaging and supporting young people to meet their order and address their offending with the assistance of secure technology supplied or authorised by Youth Justice. For young people who do not have access to such technology, Youth Justice is sourcing devices for distribution to them to facilitate their ongoing supervision.

In-person meetings can be authorised on a case by case basis

In exceptional cases, an in-person meeting with a child or young person can be authorised. Authorisation is determined on a case by case basis where there is a particular need for personal contact (e.g. if a young person needs assistance attending an appointment that cannot be facilitated remotely).

In-person meetings are authorised by the relevant General Manager or Team Leader in the region where the young person resides. All in-person meetings are subject to young people being screened for COVID-19 risk:

- Before an in-person travels for a meeting (e.g. when a young person speaks with their case manager over the phone or tablet device)
- When a young person presents at a Justice Service Centre or other nominated location.

No in-person meetings can be authorised where a young person is screened as having or at risk of having COVID-19, either before their meeting or upon presenting at a Justice Service Centre.

Engagement with Courts

Consistent with health advice, and to support implementation of current court practices, Youth Justice is supporting remote engagement with courts and remote court appearances, wherever practicable and appropriate.

Appearances by children and young people can be facilitated remotely

Youth Justice has put in place further measures to enable alternate appearance arrangements. This involves:

- For children and young people in custody who need to appear before courts, they can be supported to do so remotely via technology and audio-visual link. Additional links and technology to support this have been established at Parkville and Malmsbury.
- For children and young people on supervised community-based orders, including supervised bail, who need to appear before courts, they will be supported to do so remotely via secure technology supplied by Youth Justice.

As part of its court advice function, Youth Justice will provide courts with information about the mode of supervision in each case. In the case of applications for supervised bail and other proposed supervised community orders, information will be provided to courts about each child's and young person's technology access and capability and how supervision will be effected in that case.

Similar information will be developed by case managers as part of transition planning to inform parole decisions by the Youth Parole Board for children and young people exiting custody.

Arrangements are in place to continue the delivery of timely court advice

Youth Justice is committed to delivering ongoing and timely advice to courts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Where practicable, Youth Justice court advice staff will be supported to provide advice to

courts remotely with the assistance of technology, and in line with court practices.

Some court advice staff located at Melbourne Children's Court will be temporarily relocated to custodial settings while others will remain at the Melbourne Children's Court.

Court advice staff who are working remotely will:

- provide advice and tender reports remotely (including pre-sentencing, progress and bail assessment reports) via technology
- have access to direct telephone lines within the court's holding cells to conduct same-day bail assessments for newly remanded young people where required
- conduct same-day bail assessments remotely, via phone or video-link access to initial remand locations.

Dedicated communication channels are being organised within custodial centres to enable direct engagement between court advice staff and the courts, the prosecution and legal representatives on court sitting days.

Children's Court Youth Diversion coordinators are being supported to work from home and conduct their functions remotely.

Further contingency planning is underway

A roster of staff is being developed to provide court advice on court sitting days if staff shortages occur that impact the delivery of court advice. Dedicated email inboxes and phone lines will be set up within each regional office to service their respective courts. This will be supported by dynamic information being stored on CRIS by case-managers.