



## Recommendations of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Culture to 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

- **Edited on 26 April 2021:** Amendments required by section 58c of the Communicable Diseases Act (147/2021)

### 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 tackle 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.

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

A temporary amendment to the Communicable Diseases Act (147/2021) entered into force on 22 April 2021. Sections on new measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus epidemic (sections 58c to 58h) and the responsibilities of the authorities for implementing and supervising the measures (sections 59a to 59e) were added to the Act. The amendments will remain in force until 30 June 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 the 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 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 monitor 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 would 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. (<https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>).

Students and teachers who have any symptoms indicative of illness must not participate in contact teaching or other activities organised in 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. Those with symptoms should get tested for coronavirus. If the test results are negative and symptoms are clearly diminishing, the student may participate in contact teaching and other activities in the educational institution's premises even if the symptoms have not completely disappeared. However, contact with others must be avoided before the test results arrive. If symptoms resume or increase later, a new test should be taken and contact with others avoided. If a student living in the dormitory of an educational institution becomes ill, the institution contacts 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.

## Risk groups

During the epidemic, those belonging to a risk group should avoid close contacts. For this reason, it is not recommended that they take part in contact teaching.

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

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.

## Avoiding unnecessary physical contact

Coronavirus is primarily transmitted through droplets <https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>). Situations in which people are in direct contact with one another should be avoided in educational institutions. 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.

- 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.
- If teaching is organised for a large number of participants (such as lectures for large numbers of participants), remote connections should be used.
- The educational institutions are entitled to restrict the presence of those who are not students or staff in their educational institution.
- Separate instructions were issued on the organisation of university entrance examinations.
- To avoid close contacts, spaces should be arranged in such a way that it is possible to maintain a safe distance between people; the distance between each person should be over 2 metres whenever possible. If you have to be in close contact (less than 2 m), you must try to keep these situations as brief as possible.
- Student canteens or other facilities used for eating can be used in overlapping turns. During meals, it should be made possible to avoid close contact and to maintain a safe distance of more than 2 metres between other diners whenever possible. If close contact (less than 2 m) is essential, you must try to keep these

situations as brief as possible. Proper hygiene should be ensured when preparing and distributing food as well as during meals.

- Students in the dormitories of educational institutions can live in shared rooms if it involves long-term accommodation. In the case of short-term accommodation, the decisions on accommodation policy are made locally in consultation with the unit responsible for communicable diseases, if necessary. 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 by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health for employees (in Finnish):

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

Coronavirus is primarily transmitted through droplets (<https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases/what-s-new/coronavirus-covid-19-latest-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>).

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, wash your hands before meals, whenever you come in after you have been out, 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, use an alcohol-based sanitizer. Make sure to have hand sanitisers 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.

<https://thl.fi/en/web/infectious-diseases-and-vaccinations/diseases-and-disease-control/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 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 cleaning instructions of 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.
- Avoid using shared work or study equipment and make sure to always clean them 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 for 14 days. 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.