

Vienna, 2.9.2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

After an unusual summer, during which we hope you had the opportunity to relax a little, the start of the new school year marks the next step in a return to normality for our children and young people. As we have repeatedly emphasised, our priority is to make everyday school life feel as normal as possible for pupils, teachers, parents and guardians in this exceptional 2020/21 school year – despite the challenges that coronavirus brings. In this letter, we will outline the measures that will enable all of us to overcome these challenges together and are once again asking for your cooperation.

Clear framework and hygiene regulations for schools and childcare facilities

In mid-August, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) sent all Austrian schools a basic framework for the upcoming school year. This includes a clear hygiene and prevention concept as well as instructions on what to do at school in the various phases of the coronavirus traffic light system initiated by the Ministry of Health. As far as further preparations are concerned, we are in constant contact with the competent state government members and health authorities, the education authorities and schools.

Dealing responsibly with possible symptoms of COVID-19 and other illnesses – extension of special care leave

As children return to school in the autumn, temperatures start to fall – and that means coughs and colds are just around the corner. By now, we are all familiar with the main symptoms of COVID-19, which are not always easy to distinguish from those of a common cold. It is also possible to contract COVID-19 without developing any symptoms.

It would not be realistic to expect you, as parents and guardians, to keep your child at home because he/she has a cold. However, we would ask you to keep a close eye on your child's health and if in doubt, not to send him/her to school. One of the key symptoms is a high temperature or fever. If your child is showing signs of an infection (such as a cough, sore throat or headache), please make sure that you take his/her temperature before sending him/her to school. If your child has a body temperature of over 37.5°C, you must keep him/her at home.

We are aware that deciding whether or not to send your child to school if he/she has symptoms can be a difficult decision. It also adds to the challenges you face as mothers, fathers and

guardians trying to juggle work and family life. As parents and guardians, you know your child/children best and can play a vital role in helping to stop the spread of infectious diseases. In order to support you in this situation, the existing regulation on special care leave will be extended to February 2021. This will once again enable parents and guardians to take special leave to care for their children for a period of up to three weeks on full pay, and to do so even if they had already taken special care leave in the first six months.

Reducing diseases in general – participating in free vaccination programmes

A healthy immune system protects us from diseases. Reducing diseases with coronavirus-like symptoms greatly helps us to experience less worry and stress in day-to-day school life. Preventive vaccines play a key role here. All children under 15 living in Austria can receive selected vaccinations free of charge. A free influenza vaccination will be offered this school year for the first time. We recommend that you take up this offer.


Trusting your school and childcare facility

This fight against the spread of coronavirus, the importance of education and the need to pursue your career are three challenges that are difficult to reconcile, creating tension and stress. You, your child/children and the teachers at your school form an important team. When it comes to the “best” way of dealing with COVID-19 for everyone, opinions will sometimes differ. What unites us all, however, is our commitment to work together to tackle this crisis with an understanding of the worries and fears of others.

We would like to thank you and your children for your cooperation.



Ihr Heinz Faßmann
Federal Minister for Education,
Science and Research



Christine Aschbacher
Federal Minister for Labour,
Family and Youth

If you have any questions, please contact the coronavirus hotlines set up by the BMBWF and the education authorities:

www.bmbwf.gv.at/hotlines_schule (in German)

To find out how daily school life will be organised in the autumn, visit:

www.bmbwf.gv.at/elterninfo (in German)

If you have any questions about special care leave, you can find more information at:

<https://www.bmafj.gv.at/Services/News/Coronavirus/FAQ--Sonderbetreuungszeit.html> (in German)

English translation of the leaflet to parents and guardians in German with the following title

Gemeinsam gegen Corona! Schule im Herbst 2020

Tackling coronavirus together! School in autumn 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This leaflet provides at-a-glance information alongside details of the measures and support that are being put in place to help you and your child in this exceptional 2020/21 school year.

The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)

How is my school prepared for the 2020/21 school year?

The BMBWF has informed all schools of the measures that can be taken at school to help prevent a COVID-19 outbreak and about what needs to be done in the different phases of the traffic light system.

www.bmbwf.gv.at/schuleimherbst (in German)

Who will tell me which traffic light phase applies at my school and what do I then need to do?

You will be informed by your school leadership team or crisis team. The traffic light system comprises four phases: green, yellow, orange and red. In general, the green phase applies – in other words, the school operates as normal. In the yellow and orange phases, there will be further precautionary measures; these will mainly involve keeping away from “new” people and avoiding long periods of social contact. In the red phase, the school will switch back to distance learning.

www.bmbwf.gv.at/coronaampel (in German)

How will my child be provided with learning materials if the school is temporarily closed?

As a rule, every school works with a specific digital learning portal and will use this portal to continue teaching. Primary schools will mostly use a mixture of printed material and digital content.

Can I also provide my child with digital learning content?

Yes. The content platform Eduthek offers a variety of exercise materials for all ages and school levels.
www.eduthek.at (in German)

What can I do to help prevent a COVID-19 outbreak at my child's school?

- Strengthen your child's immune system (healthy food, outdoor physical activity, etc.).
- Keep an eye on your child's health.
- If your child has a fever, please keep him/her at home.
- If your child has several coronavirus-like symptoms at the same time, such as a cough, sore throat, headache or loss of smell and taste, he/she should not come to school.
- If your child's symptoms make you suspect that he/she could have coronavirus, please call 1450 and inform your school.
- Let your child participate in vaccination programmes.
- Many preventive vaccinations are free of charge. This school year, the flu vaccination will also be free.

www.sozialministerium.at

Who can help me if I have used up all my annual leave and I need to look after my sick child?

The regulation entitling parents and guardians to take special care leave of up to three weeks on full pay is being extended.

<https://www.bmafj.gv.at/>

Who can I contact if I would like to talk about the difficulties and stress that COVID-19 has caused for me and my family?

Each federal state has a number of counselling centres providing psychological support for school children and their families (schulpsychologische Beratungsstellen). You can contact these centres by phone or email. This free service is available in several languages.

www.schulpsychologie.at (in German)

I have a question about school/COVID-19. Where can I find information?

The BMBWF and the education authority in your federal state have set up dedicated coronavirus hotlines. All phone numbers at a glance:

www.bmbwf.gv.at/hotlines_schule (in German)

The BMBWF website provides an up-to-date overview of the current situation, including an extensive set of FAQs related to COVID-19 and education.

www.bmbwf.gv.at/corona (in German)