

Change in the protocol for positive case tracing in schools

Within the framework of the tracing of positive coronavirus cases, the Epidemiological Monitoring and Control of Infectious Diseases Unit of the Ministry of Health has identified transmission chains in school units. The increased positive cases in schools can spread the virus to the community, as individuals (students and staff), in addition to their in-school contacts, may consequently transmit the virus within their family and in their social environment.

Therefore, in order to reduce the possibility of virus spreading in schools and the community, the Ministry of Health, in consultation with the Ministry of Education and the Scientific Advisory Committee on coronavirus, has changed the protocol for tracing positive cases in schools. In specific:

- Close contacts of every student or teacher who is a positive case are **all children who are in the same classroom**, as well as the **out-of-class contacts** during breaks, on the bus, at social gatherings, etc., and they must **self-isolate**.
- In cases where in a school unit (school or cycle) different students/teachers **from three and/or more different classes are positive cases within a week, the school closes and distance learning is in force for a week**. Regarding Primary Schools, all the classes of the cycle close, if classrooms are located separately.
- **One week after the unit closes** (on the 6th day after closure), members of **the whole school undergo a rapid antigen test** (nasal sampling for minors), except for classes that are considered close contacts and must remain self-isolated for the overall indicated time. Classes that do not have a new positive case, return the next day. For classes where a new positive case is traced, only the students/teachers of the class who are not a close contact and have a negative test may return to school.
- During the period that the school unit operates via distance learning, **students do not participate in their afternoon and extracurricular activities**, as well.

By changing the procedure, **the possibility of creating a chain in schools is reduced**, and at the same time, **educational work is protected in the classes that do not have positive cases**.

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