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Reopening schools to all students a high-risk strategy new research review reveals

The current case to reopen schools to all students is a high-risk strategy according to a [new research review released](#) today by Dr Adele Schmidt for the Independent Education Union of Australia – Queensland and Northern Territory (IEUA-QNT) Branch.

The research review (see attached) analyses the long-standing and peer-reviewed research regarding how readily students can spread a disease.

Dr Schmidt said current calls for schools to reopen ignored established research regarding the potential for students to infect scores of contacts with a disease in a given day.

“So much is still unknown about this disease and a shift back to ‘business as usual’ in our schools is a fraught and dangerous one - relying on claims that have not been well tested nor peer-reviewed about the infectivity of COVID-19 in students and students themselves as infection agents,” Dr Schmidt said.

“If the claims being made are wrong, the US research outlined in my review, shows the infection would surge given the number of contacts a student has in any one day,” she said.

In her analysis, Dr Schmidt highlights the findings of a 2006 American study [1] of influenza transmission in a model township of ~10,000 people, segregated into age groups based on data compiled from the 2000 United States census.

Dr Schmidt said the study paid particular attention to the role of children and young people – and their day-to-day interactions in schools and other social venues – in the spread of disease.

“The study found that although children and teenagers comprised only 29% of the population, they accounted for up to 59% of infectious contacts given their typical contact with scores of others each day,” Dr Schmidt said.

“In applying the findings of the research to the current pandemic, it is important to note that the likelihood of disease transmission during any given social interaction is also influenced by factors such as infectivity of the pathogen and susceptibility of participants in that interaction.

“While early data [2] on transmission of COVID-19 in New South Wales schools would appear to confirm that transmission among children is less common than for influenza – we don’t yet have robust data on virulence of the coronavirus in question.

“The NSW data is very limited and is based on the interactions of students and staff from just 10 high schools and five primary schools taking place after 23 March 2020, when students had already started to withdraw from schools in significant numbers.

“This means the study did not examine disease transmission as it would occur in the normal day-to-day activities of schools.

“A recent presentation from Professor Raina MacIntyre – an expert on respiratory transmissible viral infections – makes the point that children infected with a coronavirus may transmit the infection even when asymptomatic and that the period during which they may infect others appears to be prolonged [3].

“Professor MacIntyre also notes that we do not yet have sufficient data to make conclusions about child-child or child-adult transmission rates.

“Evidence from New Zealand [4] shows that high rates of COVID-19 transmission can occur in schools.

“In fact, one of New Zealand’s most significant infection clusters (93 cases) is linked to a single school – Marist College in Auckland.

Dr Schmidt pointed to an alert [5] overnight from the British Government as to what appears to be the potential emergence of a coronavirus-related syndrome in children.

“This is a significant and very worrying development which only adds to the case for schools to remain closed to the majority of students,” Dr Schmidt said.

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References

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2. National_Centre_for_Immunisation_Research_and_Surveillance, *COVID-19 in schools – the experience in NSW*. 2020, NCIRS: Sydney.
3. McIntyre, R., *The COVID-19 pandemic update: transmission, herd immunity and is an exit strategy possible?* 2020, Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales: Sydney.
4. Ministry_of_Health. *COVID-19 - Significant clusters*. 2020 [cited 2020 26 April]; Available from: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-current-situation/covid-19-current-cases/covid-19-significant-clusters>.
5. Shields, B., *'Very worried': Britain issues alert as possible new coronavirus syndrome emerges in children*, in *The Age*. 2020, Fairfax Media: Melbourne.